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'THE NEW REPUBLIC' AND THE IDEAL WEEKLY

IT will be generally agreed that *The New Republic* holds a high place among weeklies of its kind. It is not for nothing that it is to be found on the shelves of those who take an intelligent interest in the contemporary world. For its position there is by no means entirely explained by the understanding it makes possible of what is going on in America to-day. It has enjoyed a number of passing tributes in these pages and elsewhere which challenge investigation. Yet the present article does not pretend to deal at all adequately with *The New Republic*, and the conclusions I have attempted to draw have a limited and special bearing. Though as will appear in due course it is a measure of the success of *The New Republic* that one can select from its total output what represents the main achievement without serious risk of distortion. All that follows here is based immediately on an examination of one year's numbers (the actual year 1931 was chosen as being sufficiently recent and at the same time far enough removed to ensure a proper critical balance) controlled by the impressions gleaned from fairly constant reading over the last few years.

There is a certain vanity in laying down *a priori* what a good critical weekly should be. This vanity is in direct proportion to the ineffectiveness of suggestions so made. For if one does not lose all touch with what is possible under present conditions there is the further risk that the most brilliant abstract statement may through lack of illustration fail to convince. The object of this essay is, while avoiding these defects by the suggestion of a concrete 'control' provided by even so scanty an examination of the pages of *The New Republic* as is attempted here, to suggest an approach towards the formulation of a standard for a weekly journal of opinion. I propose to review the contents of the copies I have selected, to pass on to certain immediate inferences which can be fairly made on the strength of this evidence, and in suggesting where *The New Republic* attains or falls short of its standard to come near to an ideal that is both realizable and will serve as a criterion by which our English weeklies can be measured.

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In format *The New Republic* resembles the English model. Its regular features are a review of the week's affairs, a number of general articles, columns on party politics, finance, the theatre, with a final section devoted to book reviews. Its tone is 'serious,' of the kind which in certain circles might earn it a polite sneer. That is to say, it takes its responsibilities seriously and claims (by implication at least) that progress can be made, and that it fulfils a genuine function. On the other hand it is far from being solemn: but (a marked contrast here with English journals) its humour serves the general purpose. There is nothing which resembles the occasional 'light' leaders of the *Times* or the *Manchester Guardian* or the playful essays of Y.Y. It has no literary competition or cross-word corner.

The articles (again in contrast with English periodicals) are the most praiseworthy feature of *The New Republic*. They may roughly be classified under five heads, but as will be seen later the treatment is such as makes rigid classification impossible. At any rate there is one broad class of articles which treats of matters which are engaging or should engage the immediate attention of the government. As far as I can judge they are extremely competent and present a wealth of technical detail and such acquaintance with the problems of government as comes rightly from experts who expect to be read by an intelligent public and by fellow experts. Though it lies well outside my competence I risk the observation that they are more impressive on questions of internal administration than on long term policy. The occasional supplements that I remember struck me as models; at least I can imagine that in the schools to which *The New Republic* is offered at a cheap rate the handbook issued before the last presidential election or the supplement on the depression came as a godsend.

The articles on general economic questions maintain an equally high standard. When descending to the details of business *The New Republic* shows a particularity that I suppose our libel laws would prevent. In 1931 there were two excellent series of articles by J. T. Flynn on chain stores and on graft in business. Closely associated with this kind of writing are the articles on general social questions. The selected year is rich in examples. For there were running at the same time articles by Edmund Wilson on the slump

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conditions and Stuart Chase's comparison of Middletown and Mexico, both of which were later published in book form and still have an educational value. Whereas in this field *The New Republic* appears more lively than any English journal and manages to throw light on so many aspects of American life which do not come up for comment in England, the articles on foreign politics are often more naïve and presuppose a public less well-informed on such questions than ours. Some of the best reports are reprints from *The New Statesman*, and some others read more like digests of other European papers. Over the British Empire they appear to take a too simplified attitude which the following quotation fairly represents:

> 'We do not know whether India is fit to govern itself: we know that Great Britain at least, is not fit to govern it, and that her attempt to do so is a source of danger and corruption to herself and other peoples.'

The articles on the sciences, arts and philosophy do not call for separate consideration under this head. They are in fact merely an opportunity to treat at greater length topics which arise from the general reviewing. Though it may be remarked in passing that *The New Republic* gives more extended treatment to philosophical questions than is found in non-technical journals in England. In 1931 there were excellent articles on Critical Realism, Emile Meyerson and on Humanism. Whatever be one's opinion of Dewey as a philosopher, there is no doubt that England has no philosophical journalist of his calibre.

In many respects (though with reservations, as will appear) the reviewing pages are a model of what weekly criticism should be. At any rate a strict comparison of a review of the same book from *The New Republic* and *The New Statesman* provides an exercise in comparative criticism which supplies its own comment. Quite an anthology of opinions that would hold to-day could be taken from this one year. How little good reviewing even *The Spectator* yields per annum is well known. A notable feature of the reviewing section is the space given to general literary questions. For example in 1931 Lewis Mumford wrote an excellent article on Regionalism in Literature which was followed up by Allen Tate. Dos Passos made a survey of the New York theatre which should

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in my opinion have had a greater effect on the present dramatic critic than appears. The best part of what was eventually published as *Exile's Return* was also running in this year.

The *New Republic* reviewers are not handicapped by the belief general in England that no useful service can be served by trying to assess the importance of contemporary literary figures. They are constantly engaged in sorting out of their recent history those writers who have something important to say. The following written in 1931 will serve as an indication of their pretensions. Lewis Mumford is writing about Veblen.

> 'Perhaps the chief reason for his neglect among economists was the fact that he was so much more than an economist. He was one of the half-dozen important figures in scholarship that America had produced since the Civil War, certainly in the social sciences: when one has added Lewis Morgan, Henry Adams, William James and Charles Pierce one has about completed the roster of decisive and original minds. Veblen's thought should not be confined to economic circles: it should be filtering through and penetrating every pore of our intellectual fibre.'

One of the happiest features of *New Republic* reviews for English readers is their immunity from respect for established English values. Like most Americans (one suspects) they are always on the look out for the signs of decay in English tradition. Perhaps there is nothing very creditable in refusing to be impressed by the published lectures of H. W. Garrod of whom they write: 'he belongs completely to the genteel tradition of Oxford and Boston and he says nothing to those who dislike its graceful sterility.' But it is quite refreshing to see the sort of book which in England receives the place of honour neatly 'placed' in a shorter notice. There have been excellent reviews of this kind in the past years. In 1931 I noticed several, the neatest of which is the following analysis of George Moore's style: 'its syntax is Pater, its rhythms and archaic diction out of the Authorised Version or the Butcher-Lang translation of Homer.' On the other hand (though more clearly in 1931 than later) there is observable a distressing tendency to take over Bloomsbury values without question. A possible recent example was the adoption of Messrs. Auden, Lewis and Spender, though their supposed political interest may have been

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an added inducement. Yet here we are in the happy position to record the recovery made not long afterwards. Edmund Wilson is writing. ' I confess to being rather disappointed by these last two books of W. H. Auden's. It looks as if the group to which he belongs—the school of young Oxford poets which includes C. Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Louis Macneice had lapsed, after their first lift of enthusiasm for the clean sweep of society promised by Communism, of repudiation of the world to which they belong, into a period of relaxation and vagueness, of cooling down and marking time. And it has come to be a depressing feature of the literary scene at the present time (noticeable also in this country) that writers who had hitherto seemed able to stand on their own feet have begun flopping over one another and imitating one another's idiom—without there necessarily being any question of the normal attraction of the weaker towards the stronger.'

A reader who is chiefly interested in the criticism of American writers is presented over a period of years with a gradual crystallization of opinion about the important contemporary writers. For instance, during 1931 one could find the following which are taken at random. What I suppose is the sanctioned verdict on Dreiser appears in a review in which are mentioned 'the deep ingenuousness of his mind,' his naiveté, want of discrimination and incapacity for evaluation. ' His novel is a document rather than an imaginative performance.' Allen Tate writing of Edna St. Vincent Millay, after comparing one of her sonnets with Yeats' poem *Leda,* shows that ' properly speaking she has no style but has subtly transformed to her use the indefinable average of poetic English.' *The New Republic* enables its readers to participate in the best opinion of the day and not to be twenty or fifty years behind the times as in England.

After this rather haphazard cataloguing of contents there remains the task of assessing the merits of *The New Republic* in the light of its own pretensions. A major handicap to any liberal review in America which hopes to influence the political life of the country is the existing party system. To the credit of *The New Republic* it must be allowed that it is well aware of this handicap. In 1931 the editors wrote: ' no consequences of any

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moment follow from its advice to voters in a presidential election.' They are not only aware of the difficulty but have sought the only means to overcome it. In this same year there appeared a series of articles on the need for a third party, then, of course, to be a liberal opposition. Since then, while recognizing this need, and showing willingness to offer its pages to further discussion, a timely sense of other political realities has kept them from premature action.

One of the great difficulties in the conduct of a critical weekly is to maintain the proper connection between the political and what may be called roughly for convenience the literary side. It is notorious that this difficulty has proved too great for *The New Statesman*. A happy union depends on a community of outlook among the editors and the public and a genuine and serious interest in both sides. The unity of tone in *The New Republic* is remarkable, though certain attendant difficulties have not been overcome. For the most common danger is that one side may improperly dominate the other. Various controversies in *The New Republic* show that the delicacy of this balance and the nature of the underlying unity have been subjects of acute conflict. I discovered only one example in 1931 of what in recent years is an obvious tendency. In a review of a novel by Dos Passos G. Hicks wrote: 'his communistic theories give him a definite and advantageous attitude towards the material he works with—since the communist, unlike the liberal, wholeheartedly accepts industry and all its natural consequences, rejecting only those features of our order that derive from the private ownership of property.' On the other hand he ends his review with this: 'whatever happens to our social order the necessity for humanising the machine will remain.'

An editorial introduction to a series of articles runs: 'they are the outcome of conversations among the Editors of *The New Republic* that have been occurring for several months and the gist of which may be of interest to our readers as raw material for thought and discussion.' That there is a continuous interchange of criticism among those responsible for *The New Republic* we are made sufficiently aware without this explicit reminder. Such criticism apart from its value in securing unity has the equally useful result of clarifying differences. A sickly feature of English periodicals—the over-indulgent treatment by fellow reviewers of any

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book written by the fraternity—is almost wholly absent from *The New Republic*. I say almost, for I cannot discover what else entitles Kenneth Burke to the advertisement he receives. A typical example of their method is given by the article on the work of Stuart Chase who was at about that time writing frequently in *The New Republic* in which his naïveté and the unthought-out nature of his political views was exposed. A review must finally be judged by the quality of its chief writers. Often they are too few and (as happened with that excellent organ *The New Frontier*) they write themselves out. While *The New Republic* has not met this fate and can claim as one of its chief merits its ability to call on the appropriate expert (owing chiefly to its connection with the universities and perhaps the greater accessibility as compared with things in London of the talent of New York) it cannot rise above the standard of its best writers, such as Edmund Wilson, Lewis Mumford, and Malcolm Cowley. Now whatever the reasons in each case it seems clear that E. Wilson in his recent articles on the *Finland Station* theme is inferior to the Wilson of *The American Jitters* and *Axel's Castle*. Lewis Mumford in his recent books seems to have lost the outlook which made *The Golden Age* so valuable a survey. And Malcolm Cowley at times seems more of a liability than an asset.

One may tentatively suggest (with a due and sufficiently grim awareness of the situation here) as a possible reason for this decline the poverty of the critical milieu. No weekly journalist can hope to produce good work regularly without the support of more leisured writers. Some of the *New Republic* contributors were themselves concerned in the maintenance of those lively post-war magazines which did so much for American talent, and for a time there was *The Hound and Horn*. Yet the lament that ' the reviewer who dealt regularly from a distinct point of view with subjects of serious interest seemed to have become extinct ' is evidence that they are aware of having to subsist too much on their own resources.

In 1931 the Editors wrote of *The New Republic* that ' its function is rather to deal in ideas, to aid discrimination, to provide as candid and as discerning as possible a medium of critical opinion for those who are interested in discussion of this sort.' Their statement will serve as a focus for grouping one's general criticisms of *The New Republic*. One way of answering the question whether it lives up to this claim is to point out that at least unlike *The*

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New Statesman (and incidentally, *The Times Literary Supplement*) which seems to be seeking solidarity with its readers by lowering its level *The New Republic* maintains a standard which I suspect is well above that of the average reader. After all we have only to consider the situation here to give weight to Allen Tate's remark: 'our people has no single mind for reading, no preference that is capable of maturing or is allowed to mature longer than a very few years. We have no public taste.'

This consideration—the nature of the environment and its inevitable effects on even the best intentions—must qualify the praise due to *The New Republic* for the prominent part it has played in the work of self-understanding that America seems (unlike England) to undertake with a certain verve. 'Ever since the close of the World War,' writes Matthew Josephson, 'we have seen a remarkable growth of self-consciousness and self-examination on the part of American writers.' To assess the quality of such a growth is to pronounce on the state of American culture to-day—an ambitious undertaking. But keeping close to impressions derived from *The New Republic* one may risk a few rough generalizations. First that there exists in its pages a healthy bias towards referring all questions to present needs. This attitude is seen at its most striking when a historical biography comes up for review. Put shortly it is the reverse of the constant practice here. In any English weekly there will be a long *résumé* (biography gets a disproportionate amount of reviewing space) of the more striking episodes served up with the emphasis on 'period' in a quaint and delicate dilettante antiquarianism. That there is a less creditable side to American impatience with the past must be of course admitted.

Second among the outstanding virtues is what may reasonably be called the 'Middletown' approach to society which enables *The New Republic* to blend skilfully the economic, social and cultural in their presentation of America. Here undoubtedly lies their strength and hope for a healthy development. Not surprisingly their weakest point lies in the unevenness of the literary criticism. Poetry in particular comes in for the most uncertain treatment. (It is worth noting that the actual poems printed are usually of the same insignificance as those which appear in English papers). A *New Republic* reviewer is capable of swerving from good sense

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to elementary fallacy in the course of a single article. One may of course retort that good criticism of poetry is rare enough anywhere. Yet it remains true that the central nerve which should give sharpness and delicacy to the whole body of criticism functions fitfully and as it were coarsely. A companion study to American critics such as Blackmur, Tate and others would be needed to supplement a point I am conscious here of leaving unduly vague.

Before passing on to the consideration of an ideal standard it may be well to recall a suggestion made in the opening paragraph of this essay. *The New Republic* with all its faults does at least succeed in providing a certain standard firmly enough maintained for deviations from it to be easily detected. Moreover it does supply with all its deficiencies the essential material for the irrigation of public opinion. The best available thought is sooner or later reflected in its pages. And—a note which has not been sufficiently heard in this survey—it presents its material in a lively, flexible way. It has carried on for twenty-four years in an environment probably in many ways bleaker than ours, with a circulation smaller in proportion to the size of the reading public than that, say, of *The Spectator*. And it has carried on with such relative success in spite of having at times to do the work of a quarterly as well as that of a weekly.

I hope that now the main contentions made at the beginning of this essay will appear to have been established. At least *The New Republic* shows that a weekly setting a hign standard is not an impossible dream. And some at any rate of the desiderata can be defined more satisfactorily by adding, ' as, for example, is attempted in *The New Republic*.' Without wishing to forestall conclusions to reach which much critical labour and a combination of talents would be required, I append some of the considerations which arise naturally from the study of *The New Republic*.

The New Republic suffers a concrete limitation from the poverty of what may roughly be called the critical milieu. No weekly can flourish independently, that is, can be at the same time the source and the medium of critical opinion. M. Duhamel, to whom we shall return later, traces the hierarchy from the book through the quarterly to the weekly and finally to the newspaper. This, put abstractly, sounds too beautiful to be true. Yet even in

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the last century provincial papers used the quarterlies in the process of continuous irrigation through the different levels of society. A weekly fulfils its general function in completing a certain stage in the dissemination of opinion. Some kind of consensus of opinion, and a coherent view of society as a whole (however sketchy be the coherence) is, of course, a necessary preliminary to this process. It was noted that *The New Republic* presented an outlook with such a rough coherence. The achievement of *Middletown* is here a handy reference. Such an approach with all its limitations makes possible a kind of synthesis mutually illuminating and transforming all its elements.

Now, whereas this synthesis can be concretely illustrated in *The New Republic*, it must be at once admitted that what is ordinarily understood by politics is (apart from religion) the element with the highest resistance to such inclusion in a general view. That is, political questions in the weeklies are treated as if independent, as if there were no such necessary hierarchy as was claimed for the criticism of literature. Or, if such a hierarchy is admitted, the basis for political writing seems to bear no relation to that postulated for adequate literary criticism. It was for this reason that in reviewing the political articles the only comment risked was in terms of 'competence.' But political writing involves more than the collecting and recording of relevant facts. And the immediate comment on them must frequently involve wider assumptions and previously assumed attitudes. These in the end receive their ultimate sanction from the unspecialized intelligence it would be the aim of an ideal university to foster, for whose needs the ideal weekly would cater. And if, following the suggestions of *Why Universities ?* we suppose that 'it must be in literature above all that the sense of human values gets its training' the centre with which political experts must keep in touch will have to be generated from that centre which exists on the foundation of, in the last resort, literature. So that, as things are, the literary side of a journal will have to show the way to the political side.

Unfortunately the discussion of the relation of politics to literature has been left too exclusively to Marxists. It seems a fair criticism of *Scrutiny* that it has been too content to maintain a negative attitude, and that exposure of the weakness of the Marxist position does not constitute the whole duty of a quarterly. True,

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certain large gestures have been made which lightly sketch in the position *Scrutiny* should occupy. Yet were a weekly to be founded tomorrow relying on the critical agreements reached in *Scrutiny* I do not think it could find here the basis for establishing a unity between its 'literary' and its 'political' sides. Those 'underlying issues'[1] on which the critical mind should freely play make a too infrequent appearance. Nor if we turn to the political commentary of the *Criterion* do we receive any practical help. It is true that the work with which *Scrutiny* is associated eventually breeds a general critical attitude. But it will not do, as has been pointed out, to infer directly and naïvely from the prose style of a politician his capabilities as a statesman. On the other hand, I cannot suppose that *Scrutiny* accepts as the intelligent man's view of politics or economics those of Mr. Bernard Shaw or Mr. Cole, or endorses complacently the tone of the political side of the *New Statesman*. Surely the work undertaken by *Scrutiny* does have political implications? This is no call for a general line-up on one side or other of the barricades. It is merely that *Scrutiny* should give its general attitude some more tangible shape. It seems to me that this is a task not being attempted elsewhere.

The existence of *The New Republic* is a standing challenge to the intelligent public of this country. Why have we no such paper here? It cannot be maintained that a body of experts as qualified as those which write in the American paper could not be assembled here. Nor has the disintegration of culture in England proceeded further than in America. And the need for a similar weekly here is urgent. The points I have inadequately raised call for competent and expert investigation. Before concluding that all effort is vain it would be seemly to examine the possibilities. I append a citation from the *Défense des Lettres* which might serve as a rallying point for those who still entertain some hope for the continued employment of intelligence in the direction of affairs.

> 'Certains observateurs du monde moderne ne manqueront pas de conclure que le monde se transforme en effet et que les revues n'ont qu'à disparaître. Je persiste à croire que ce serait un grand malheur. Les revues correspondent à une forme

[1]See *Scrutiny*, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 3 (*A Manifesto*).

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d'activité intellectuelle qui me semble plus que jamais nécessaire dans le désordre contemporain. Le livre est volumineux et lent. Le journal et trop bref et trop furtif. Certaine façon d'examiner, de critiquer les événements, les hommes, les ouvrages exige la revue, véhicule naturel d'une pensée vigilante, d'une pensée qui ne résigne pas sa mission.'

H. A. MASON.

HENRY JAMES'S HEIRESS:

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDITH WHARTON

THE unfinished posthumous novel of Edith Wharton just published[1] should at least serve to bring up this author's name for evaluation. It is incidentally quite worth reading if you are an amateur of the period now in fashion again (the 'seventies). It would have been far more worth publishing if Mrs. Wharton's literary executor had supplemented his appendix by a memoir and critical essay designed to introduce the present generation to her best work, scarcely ever read in England—for to the educated English public Mrs. Wharton's novels are those of her last ten years and known vaguely as the kind of fiction which was published serially in *Good Housekeeping*. But her characteristic work was all done long before, early enough for one of her good novels to have been published in World's Classics in 1936, more than thirty years after it was first printed. It was as the historian of New York society of the 'nineties that she first achieved character and eminence as a novelist, on the dual grounds, as she said, that it was ' a field as yet unexploited by any novelist who had grown up in that little hot-house of traditions and conventions ' and had been ' tacitly regarded as unassailable.' In her rapid growth as combined social critic and historian she continued to strike roots outwards and downwards until she had included in her reach the

[1] *The Buccaneers* (Appleton Century, 7/6).

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lowest levels of rustic, urban and manufacturing life. And her work was no mere historical fictionizing, she was a serious novelist. She was also an extraordinarily acute and far-sighted social critic ; in this she was original and appears still more so when we think with what an effort this detachment must have been achieved by the child brought up to believe it her ambition to become, like her mother, the best-dressed woman in New York, and who was married young to an anti-intellectual society man.

By a combination of circumstances she was peculiarly qualified to undertake such work. Her interesting autobiography[1] documents her cultural origins for us. There we are told that the best people in New York, among whom she was born, had the traditions of a mercantile middle class whose ' value lay in upholding two standards of importance in any community, that of education and good manners, and of scrupulous probity in business affairs.' This society was leisured, and satisfied with a moderate wealth—she never in her young days encountered the gold-fever in any form. It concentrated on the arts of living that radiate from home-making. It was resolutely English in culture (speaking ' pure English,' importing tutors and governesses, reading the English classics and deploring contemporary American men of letters) and habitually travelled abroad (unlike Boston) though keeping aloof from the English Court and society. She grew up to see this society disintegrate from within, its values succumbing to spiritual anæmia—' the blind dread of innovation and the instinctive shrinking from responsibility ' that she noted as its chief weaknesses and which left politics to be the prey of Business—even before its standards were overthrown by the invasion from without of the predatory new rich. Her quick intelligence made her aware of the import of changes that even an insider at the time could only have sensed, her literary ambition encouraged her to try to fix them in the novel, and her early environment and family traditions gave her a position from which to survey changes in the social scene, a code by which to judge the accompanying shifts in *mœurs*, and values by which to estimate the profit and loss. Her admiration of Henry James's work, later her great intimacy with him, provided her with a spring-board from which to take off as an artist.

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[1] *A Backward Glance* (Appleton Century, 1934).

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For her literary career began, as she said, ' in the days when Thomas Hardy, in order to bring out *Jude the Obscure* in a leading New York periodical, was compelled to turn the children of Jude and Sue into adopted orphans ; when the most popular magazine in America excluded all stories containing any reference to "religion, love, politics, alcohol or fairies " (this is textual) ; the days when a well-known New York editor, offering me a large sum for the serial rights of a projected novel, stipulated only that no reference to " an unlawful attachment " should figure in it . . . and when the translator of Dante, Professor Eliot Norton, hearing (after the appearance of *The House of Mirth*) that I was preparing another " society " novel, wrote in alarm imploring me to remember that " no great work of the imagination has ever been based on illicit passion "! ' It was equivalent to the literary England of Trollope's beginnings, yet Edith Wharton without any bravado assumed that because she did not depend on literature for her income she should ignore its ' incurable moral timidity ' and the displeasure of her social group. ' The novelist's best safeguard is to write only for that dispassionate and ironic critic who dwells within the breast ' she wrote. The likeness to Jane Austen is revealed in that, and borne out by her decision, after writing several dull psychological novels, to make a novel out of what she knew best, the fashionable New York of her early married life ' in all its flatness and futility.' In doing so she was taking up Henry James's work where he left it off with *The Bostonians* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. And in this novel she turned, as she noted, from an amateur into a professional novelist. The American novel grew up with Henry James and achieved a tradition with Mrs. Wharton. He, she points out in a passage of great interest,[1] was never at home in twentieth century America—' he belonged irrevocably to the old America out of which I also came ' and whose last traces, as she said, remained in Europe whither he fortunately went to seek them. ' Henry James was essentially a novelist of manners, and the manners he was qualified by nature and situation to observe were those of the little vanishing group of people among whom he had grown up, or their more picturesque prototypes in older societies—he often bewailed to me his total inability to use the " material,"

[1] *A Backward Glance*, pp. 175-6.

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financial and industrial, of modern American life.' And she instances James's failure to make plausible Mr. Verver in *The Golden Bowl* or 'to relate either him or his native "American City" to any sort of concrete reality.' She might have instanced her own Mr. Spragg and his Apex City in contrast, those fully realized symbols which make the later creations Babbitt and Main Street seem unnecessary as well as crude work. Unlike James, she rightly felt herself qualified to deal with the society that succeeded 'the old America' and she stayed to write its natural history, to write it in a form as shapely and with a surface as finished as if she had had a number of predecessors in her chosen task. These works had the advantage of being 'readable' as Jane Austen's and even George Eliot's were and as *The Ambassadors* was not. It is profitable to observe how, in *The Custom of the Country*, she makes use of James's technique and yet reaches a public unwilling or unable to wrestle with his formidable novels.

She was early convinced that the virtue had gone out of 'the old America' of her ancestors—'When I was young it used to seem to me that the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured.' So when she decided to make a novel out of the circle in which she lived she chose to depict it in terms of 'the slow disintegration' of Lily Bart, one of the 'wasted human possibilities' who form, she declared, 'the underpinning [on which] such social groups (the shallow and the idle) always rest.' No doubt it was her own experience that enabled her to isolate the destructive element in such societies—'the quality of making other standards non-existent by ignoring them . . . Lily's set had a force of negation which eliminated everything beyond their own range of perception.' These explanations are from the subsequent introduction. In the novel (*The House of Mirth*, 1905) this analysis is present in solution—in terms of dialogue, dramatic situation and the process by which the exquisite Lily Bart slips down into annihilation. For in these novels Mrs. Wharton never ceases to be first of all a novelist. Her social criticism is effected in the terms that produced Middlemarch society and the Dodsons in *The Mill on the Floss*, and often challenges comparison with analogous effects in Jane Austen:

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'Mrs. Gryce had a kind of impersonal benevolence: cases of individual need she regarded with suspicion, but she subscribed to Institutions when their annual reports showed an impressive surplus.'

'In her youth, girls had not been supposed to require close supervision. They were generally assumed to be taken up with the legitimate business of courtship and marriage, and interference in such affairs on the part of their natural guardians was considered as unwarrantable as a spectator's suddenly joining in a game. There had of course been "fast" girls even in Mrs. Peniston's early experience; but their fastness, at worst, was understood to be a mere excess of animal spirits, against which there could be no graver charge than that of being 'unladylike.' The modern fastness appeared synonymous with immorality, and the mere idea of immorality was as offensive to Mrs. Peniston as a smell of cooking in the drawing-room: it was one of the conceptions her mind refused to admit.'

[Of the much-divorced but 'ineradicably innocent' beauty from the West] 'The lady's offences were always against taste rather than conduct; her divorce record seemed due to geographical rather than ethical conditions; and her worst laxities were likely to proceed from a wandering and extravagant good nature.'

The feature of most permanent interest in the book is the systematic portrayal of the various groups in New York society. These are created with zest and an abundant life, surprisingly lacking animus; even distaste is lost in ironic appreciation. And no group or character is wantonly dragged in, each has an indispensable function in advancing the plot. They range from the timid millionaire of the old school, Percy Bryce:

'After attaining his majority, and coming into the fortune which the late Mr. Gryce had made out of a patent device for excluding fresh air from hotels, the young man continued to live with his mother in Albany; but on Jefferson Gryce's death, when another large property passed into her son's hands, Mrs. Gryce thought that what she called his "interests" demanded his presence in New York. She accordingly installed herself in the Madison Avenue house, and Percy, whose sense of duty was

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not inferior to his mother's, spent all his week-days in the handsome Broad Street office, where a batch of pale men on small salaries had grown grey in the management of the Gryce estate, and where he was initiated with becoming reverence into every detail of the art of accumulation '—

through the established ' good ' society—smart Trenors, dowdy Van Osburghs, and their parasites like the divorcée Mrs. Fisher—to the various social aspirants, such as the new-rich Gormans:

' Mrs. Fisher's unconventionality was, after all, a merely superficial divergence from an inherited social creed, while the manners of the Gorman circle represented their first attempt to formulate such a creed for themselves,'

the comic Wellington Brys and the financier Rosedale (not stock size) down to the outermost darkness of Mrs. Norma Hatch from the West, ' rich, helpless, unplaced,' living in the Emporium Hotel whence she endeavours to launch herself into the bosom of society. [There is an invaluable pre-Sinclair Lewis account of fashionable hotel life of the time].

' The environment in which Lily found herself was as strange to her as its inhabitants. She was unacquainted with the world of the fashionable New York hotel—a world over-heated, over-upholstered, and over-fitted with mechanical appliances for the gratification of fantastic requirements, while the comforts of a civilized life were as unattainable as in a desert. Through this atmosphere of torrid splendour moved wan beings as richly upholstered as the furniture, beings without definite pursuits or permanent relations . . . Somewhere behind them, in the background of their lives, there was doubtless a real past, peopled by real human activities: they themselves were probably the product of strong ambitions, persistent energies, diversified contacts with the wholesome roughness of life ; yet they had no more real existence than the poet's shades in limbo.

' Lily had not been long in this pallid world without discovering that Mrs. Hatch was its most substantial figure. That lady, though still floating in the void, showed faint symptoms of developing an outline . . . It was, in short, as the regulator of a germinating social life that Miss Bart's guidance was

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required ; her ostensible duties as secretary being restricted by the fact that Mrs. Hatch, as yet, knew hardly any one to write to . . . Compared with the vast gilded void of Mrs. Hatch's existence, the life of Lily's former friends seemed packed with ordered activities. Even the most irresponsible pretty woman of her acquaintance had her inherited obligations, her conventional benevolences, her share in the working of the great civic machine ; and all hung together in the solidarity of these traditional functions . . .

' Mrs. Hatch swam in a haze of indeterminate, enthusiasms, aspirations culled from the stage, the newspapers, the fashion-journals, and a gaudy world of sport still more completely beyond her companion's ken . . . The difficulty was to find any point of contact between her ideals and Lily's.'

Such a combination of sustained anthropological interest with literary ability was hitherto unknown to fiction except in *The Bostonians*. Mrs. Wharton had all the qualifications that Galsworthy so disastrously lacked ; to place *The Forsyte Saga* beside one of her characteristic novels is to expose it.

The Custom of the Country (1913) is undoubtedly her masterpiece. [It should have been obtainable in a cheap edition or ' Everyman ' long ago]. Here the theme is explicitly ' social disintegration.' But now the ' good ' New York society has shrunk to a sideshow, the centre is consciously occupied by the moneyed barbarians ; they lack both a moral and a social code but are fast acquiring the latter by imitation. Whereas old New York (like Henry James's Boston) by keeping itself to itself had evolved an independent culture, new New York is shown trying to construct an imitation of European culture by copying its social surface, by acquiring it by marriage, by buying up its antiques and by reproducing its architectural masterpieces at home:

' Bowen, from his corner, surveyed a seemingly endless perspective of plumed and jewelled heads, of shoulders bare or black-coated encircling the close-packed tables. During some forty years' perpetual exercise of his perceptions he had never come across anything that gave them the special titillation produced by the sight of the dinner-hour at the Nouveau Luxe: the same sense of putting his hand on human nature's passion

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for the factitious, its incorrigible habit of imitating the imitation. As he sat watching the familiar faces swept towards him on the rising tide of arrival—for it was one of the joys of the scene that the type was always the same even when the individual was not—he hailed with renewed appreciation this costly expression of a social ideal. The dining-room at the Nouveau Luxe represented, on such a spring evening, what unbounded material power had devised for the delusion of its leisure: a phantom "society," with all the rules, smirks, gestures of its model, but evoked out of promiscuity and incoherence while the other had been the product of continuity and choice. And the instinct which had driven a new class of world-compellers to bind themselves to slavish imitation of the superseded, and their prompt and reverent faith in the reality of the sham they had created, seemed to Bowen the most satisfying proof of human permanence.'

'Small, cautious, middle-class, had been the ideals of aboriginal New York; but they were singularly coherent and respectable as contrasted with the chaos of indiscriminate appetites which made up its modern tendencies . . . What Popple called society was really just like the houses it lived in: a muddle of misapplied ornament over a thin steel shell of utility. The steel shell was built up in Wall Street, the social trimmings were hastily added in Fifth Avenue; and the union between them was as monstrous and factitious, as unlike the gradual homogeneous growth which flowers into what other countries know as society, as that between the Blois gargoyles on Peter Van Degen's roof and the skeleton walls supporting them.'

The writing is unbrokenly taut and incisive, with sustained local vitality. The hero reflects on his 'aboriginal family'—'Harriet Ray, sealed up tight in the vacuum of inherited opinion, where not a breath of fresh sensation could get at her,' 'hardly anything that mattered to him existed for them, and their prejudices reminded him of sign-posts warning off trespassers who have long since ceased to intrude.' Instead of the downward drift characteristic of *The House of Mirth* we are initiated into the triumphant social and material progress of Undine Spragg, type of the new as Lily Bart was of the superseded. Thanks to an inborn lack

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of either moral sense or introspective qualms Undine hauls herself to the top of the ladder, trampling husbands, family decencies and social codes underfoot, perpetually violating in all unconsciousness even her own moral professions. Yet Undine is not a monster. She is felt to be less of one than Rosamund Vincy, George Eliot's masterpiece on the same pattern, and there is a stimulus to be derived from the display of her tactics. The pattern of this novel lends itself to a kind of irony congenial to Mrs. Wharton—the latent irony that is to be discovered in certain kinds of situation: the clash between civilized and primitive *mœurs*, between pretence and actuality, intention and achievement. Her novels are rich in social comedy, displayed with something like Jane Austen's enjoyment, though the victory does not, as in the latter's works, go to the finer spirits.

The next novel in this line is *Twilight Sleep* (1927), which displays the chaos that followed on the establishment of a society based on money without any kind of traditions. It is inferior to the earlier work in its tendency to come down on the side of the farcical in the study of Pauline Manford, whose optimistic progress through life is symbolized in the title. ' '' Of course there ought to be no Pain . . . nothing but Beauty . . . It ought to be one of the loveliest, most poetic things in the world to have a baby,'' Mrs. Manford declared, in that bright efficient voice which made loveliness and poetry sound like the attributes of an advanced industrialism, and babies something to be turned out in series like Fords.' Nevertheless it compares favourably with Huxley's and other novels treating of the same kind of life. Pauline, whose millions were made in the Middle West from the manufacture of motors, appears intended to embody the crude virtues of the invaders of pioneer stock, for with all her innocence of culture and her belief in activity for its own sake and her muddled passion for universal spiritual progress—in spite of this she is seen to have a respectable aspect too. For opposed to her is the next generation, represented by her daughter-in-law and her social group, whose insolent irresponsibility and empty vice set off whatever it was worth admiring—some moral positive or intuitive decency? that at least kept the family from going to pieces—that Edith Wharton felt evan a Pauline Manford retained but was then (in the 'twenties) melting away under her eyes: the last stage of the social disinte-

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gration she had analysed and chronicled and turned into art. She had lived, she felt, to see disappear ' the formative value of nearly three hundred years of social observance: the concreted living up to long-established standards of honour and conduct, of education and manners.'

This sequence leads up to the fiction of Scott Fitzgerald, Faulkner and Kay Boyle, among others, and without it their writings cannot be understood by the English reader. This school depicts (Faulkner and Kay Boyle with approval) a kind of life, without roots or responsibilities, where value is attributed only to drunkenness and allied states of excess. This phase of American culture is conveniently illustrated by the career of the late Harry Crosby. Mrs. Wharton's autobiography contains a first-hand account of the earlier half of this cultural disintegration. Read in sequence, after *The Education of Henry Adams* and Henry James's *A Small Boy and Others*, and before Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return*, it provides the English student with part of this indispensable background to American literature—the cultural history of literary America which, if Van Wyck Brooks's *The Flowering of New England* had been executed by an able critic, would now be complete to date in five volumes.

Later on she attempted to supplement her sequence by historical studies—*The Age of Innocence* (1920) and *Old New York* (1924)—of the static society of her grandparents' days. But the historical novel necessarily bears about the same relation to art as the waxwork, and in any case her talents found congenial only the contemporary and the changing. Here she has to reproduce ' the old New York way of taking life "without effusion of blood." '

Nevertheless there are good things in both books. One remembers the analysis of

> ' That terrifying product of the social system he belonged to and believed in, the young girl who knew nothing and expected everything. His own exclamation: " Women should be free—as free as we are," struck to the root of a problem that it was agreed in his world to regard as non-existent. " Nice " women, however wronged, would never claim the kind of freedom he meant, and generous-minded men like himself were therefore—in the heat of argument—the more chivalrously ready to concede

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it them. Such verbal generosities were in fact only a humbugging disguise of the inexorable convention that tied things together and bound people down to the old pattern. In reality they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs, as when . . . The result, of course, was that the young girl who was the centre of this elaborate system of mystification remained the more inscrutable for her very frankness and assurance. She was frank, poor darling, because she had nothing to conceal, assured because she knew of nothing to be on her guard against . . . But when he had gone the brief round of her he returned discouraged by the thought that all this frankness and innocence were only an artificial product. Untrained human nature was not frank and innocent ; it was full of the twists and deferences of an instinctive guile.'

After this sequence she ceased to write novels worthy of herself. Partly she was growing old, partly, as she wrote in her memoirs, she should have ceased to write because ' the world she had grown up in and been formed by had been destroyed in 1914.'

But her work is by no means so limited as this may have suggested, even though suggestions have been made that she turned Henry James's early work from a sport to the beginning of a tradition, that she was the nearest thing to an American Jane Austen, and the archetype of a Galsworthy. As far back as 1907 she had shown, in *The Fruit of the Tree*, her recognition of the general social problem and her refusal to limit her subject-matter to the moneyed or educated strata of Americans. Heaven knows where she got her knowledge of mill-towns, but here, though the novel is uncertain in intention and now only readable in patches, she revealed the split between the capitalist ruling class and the oppressed mill-hands, the worthlessness of the lives of the one and the misery of the lives of the other. Nor do we know how she acquired the material for that moving study of the sufferings of the respectable poor, the short story *Bunner Sisters*. Mrs. Wharton's presentation of the poor [of New York in the horse-car period in this story, of the hill-farm folk in *Ethan Frome* (1911) and of the New England rustics in *Summer* (1917)] is like George Eliot's in its sympathy and its freedom from sentimental evasions, but

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without the latter's large nobility that throws a softening light on all wretchedness. She is prone to end on a note of suspension in fierce irony that was not included in George Eliot's make-up. Mrs. Wharton, with her unmannered style and impersonal presentation, solved the problem of tone by ignoring the reader altogether. These three *nouvelles* might well be issued in England in one volume, everyone interested in literature ought to read them at least once—they are works of art, and historically they have some importance. She was the first to outrage the accepted pretence of seeing the New England countryside idyllically. Hers was informed realism. 'For years I had wanted to draw life as it really was in the derelict mountain villages of New England, a life even in my time, and a thousandfold more a generation earlier, utterly unlike that seen through the rose-coloured spectacles of my predecessors, Mary Wilkins and Sarah Orne Jewett. In those days the snow-bound villages of Western Massachusetts were still grim places, morally and physically: insanity, incest and slow mental and moral starvation were hidden away behind the paintless wooden house-fronts. *Ethan Frome* was written after I had spent ten years in the hill-region where the scene is laid, during which years I had come to know well the aspect, dialect and mental and moral attitude of the hill-people.' In consequence *Summer*, and the inferior but better-known *Ethan Frome*, stand, along with the Scottish specimen, *The House with the Green Shutters*, in the *Wuthering Heights* category.

Mrs. Wharton's interest in the contemporary social scene then was deep and wide as well as acute and witty. *Silas Marner* is rightly considered a classic of our language, but except for the accidental advantage of having a more attractive social picture to reproduce—a mellower setting, less ungracious *mœurs*, a more comely dialect—it seems to me inferior to *Summer*. The village of North Dormer, 'abandoned of men, left apart by all the forces that link life to life in modern communities,' where only those remain who can't get away or who have drifted back wrecked, completes Mrs. Wharton's social survey. Outside North Dormer is the Mountain, the home of a colony of squatters, bad characters and outlaws, who represent the limits of degradation to which society can sink—they have neither material civilization nor moral tradition. Mrs. Wharton declared that they were drawn in every

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detail from life. She was bold enough to seize on the Mountain for an unforgettable symbol that few novelists would have cared or dared to touch (it was received, she recorded, ' with indignant denial by reviewers and readers '). And the understanding shown in these three stories of the workings of uneducated, rustic and similar inarticulate kinds of minds is more convincing than George Eliot's, even as hers is more plausible than Hardy's, both these last having a suspicious tendency to humorous effects and George Eliot besides being never quite free from a shade of superiority in her attitude to intellectual inferiors.

Edith Wharton's value seems to me therefore not merely, as Mr. Edmund Wilson said in a recent article (' Justice to Edith Wharton,' *The New Republic*, June 29th, 1938) that she wrote ' in a period (1905-1917) when there were few American writers worth reading.' I am convinced that anyone interested in the cultural basis of society, and anyone sensitive to quality in the novel, will find this selection of her writings I have made of permanent worth and unique in character. The final question then is, what order of novelist is she?—*i.e.*, not how permanent but how good? She was, until her decay, a tough-minded, robust artist, not the shrinking minor writer or the ladylike talent. It is characteristic that she should refer to ' that dispassionate and ironic critic who dwells within the breast ' of authors, and equally so that she should have considered the unencouraging atmosphere (indifference to her literary success and disapproval of her choosing to write) of her family and social circle, and the adverse reviews she received from outside, stimulating to talent, just as she accepted the severest professional criticism as valuable. This, she said, was better for fostering literary ability than ' premature flattery and local celebrity ' and having one's path smoothed ; one contrasts this with Mrs. Woolf's claims for the creative temperament. She was a born artist ; of the work of her prime she could justly say ' My last page is latent in my first.' Of how many novels in the English language before hers can that be said? She had the advantage of being a solidly-educated lady frequenting the most cultivated society of England and France. As an artist she had Henry James behind her work, whereas Sinclair Lewis, when he later attempted similarly to epitomize his environment in fiction, had only H. G. Wells behind his. She was remarkably intelligent ;

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it is easy as well as more popular to be wise after the event (like Sinclair Lewis) but it takes a kind of genius to see your culture from the outside, to diagnose what is happening and plot its curves contemporaneously as she did. Jane Austen never got outside (of course she could never have imagined doing so): her social criticism is all from the inside and remains indoors without so much as a glance out of the window. It is not only that in Jane Austen social forces never come up for comment or that she accepts the theory of the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate, but that she can mention the enclosure of the commons as the natural subject of conversation for the gentlemen at dinner—just that and no more. Yet there can be no question that Jane Austen was a great novelist while Edith Wharton's greatest admirer would not claim that title for her. What makes a great novelist? Apparently not intelligence or scope or a highly-developed technique, though, other things being equal, they often give an advantage. But what then are the other things?

Again, compare Edith Wharton with George Eliot. George Eliot was a simple-minded woman except where great sensitiveness of feeling gave her a subtle insight—even her learning was deployed with solemn simplicity. Undeniably Mrs. Wharton had a more flexible mind, she was both socially and morally more experienced than George Eliot and therefore better able to enter into uncongenial states of feeling and to depict as an artist instead of a preacher distasteful kinds of behaviour. Her Undine Spragg is better sustained and handled than the other's Rosamund Vincy. Undine's sphere of action is dazzling and she always has a fresh surprise for us up her sleeve in the way of moral obtuseness; it was cleverer to make Undine end up at the top of the tree with her only disappointment that her last husband couldn't get made Ambassador (on account of having a divorced wife) than to involve herself in disasters like Rosamund: the manifold irony of worldly success is more profitable than any simple moral lesson and artistically how much richer! Mrs. Wharton writes better than George Eliot, who besides lacking grace rarely achieves the economy of language that Mrs. Wharton commands habitually. Her technique is absolutely right and from the works I have instanced it would be difficult to alter or omit without harm, for like Henry James she was the type of conscious artist writing to satisfy only

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her own inflexible literary conscience. Now George Eliot in general moves like a cart-horse and too often takes the longest way round. But again it is George Eliot who is the great novelist.

I think it eventually becomes a question of what the novelist has to offer us, either directly or by implication, in the way of positives. In *Bunner Sisters*, *Summer*, and some other places Mrs. Wharton rests upon the simple goodness of the decent poor, as indeed George Eliot and Wordsworth both do in part, that is, the most wide-spread common factor of moral worth. But beyond that Mrs. Wharton has only negatives, her values emerging I suppose as something other than what she exposes as worthless. This is not very nourishing, and it is on similar grounds that Flaubert, so long admired as the ideal artist of the novel, has begun to lose esteem. It seems to be the fault of the disintegrating and spiritually impoverished society she analyses. Her value is that she does analyse and is not content to reflect. We may contrast Jane Austen, who does not even analyse, but, having the good fortune to have been born into a flourishing culture, can take for granted its foundations and accept its standards, working within them on a basis of internal relations entirely. The common code of her society is a valuable one and she benefits from it as an artist. Mr. Knightley's speech to Emma, reproving her for snubbing Miss Bates, is a useful instance: mannners there are seen to be based on moral values. Mrs. Wharton's worthy people are all primitives or archaic survivals. This inability to find any significance in the society that she spent her prime in, or to find 'significance only through what its frivolity destroys,' explains the absence of poetry in her disposition and of many kinds of valuable experience in her books. She has none of that natural piety, that richness of feeling and sense of a moral order, of experience as a process of growth, in which George Eliot's local criticisms are embedded and which give the latter her large stature. Between her conviction that the new society she grew up into was vicious and insecurely based on an ill-used working class and her conviction that her inherited mode of living represented a dead-end, she could find no foundation to build on. We may see where her real strength lay in the critical phrases she uses—'Her moral muscles had become atrophied' ['by buying off suffering with money, or denying its existence with words'] ; 'the super-

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ficial contradictions and accommodations of a conscience grown elastic from too much use '—and in the short story ' Autres Temps . . . ' a study of the change in moral codes she had witnessed since her youth. Here the divorced mother, who had for many years hidden her disgrace in Florence, returns to America to succour, as she thinks, her divorced and newly remarried daughter. At first, finding the absence of any prejudice against divorce in the new America, she is exalted, then she feels in her bewilderment ' " I didn't take up much room before, but now where is there a corner for me?" ' ' Where indeed in this crowded, topsy-turvey world, with its headlong changes and helter-skelter readjustments, its new tolerances and indifferences and accommodations, was there room for a character fashioned by slower sterner processes and a life broken under their inexorable pressure?' And finally, depressed by what she feels to be the lack of any kind of moral taste, she loses her illusions about the real benefits of such a change, she finds it to be merely a change in social fashions and not a revolution bringing genuine enlightenment based on good feeling. She explains to an old friend: ' " Traditions that have lost their meaning are the hardest of all to destroy . . . We're shut up in a little tight round of habit and association, just as we're shut up in this room . . . We're all imprisoned, of course—all of us middling people, who don't carry freedom in our brains. But we've accommodated ourselves to our different cells, and if we're moved suddenly into new ones we're likely to find a stone wall where we thought there was air, and to knock ourselves senseless against it." ' She chooses to return to Florence, ' moving again among the grim edges of reality.'

Mrs. Wharton, if unfortunate in her environment, had a strength of character that made her superior to it. She was a remarkable novelist if not a large-sized one, and while there are few great novelists there are not even so many remarkable ones that we can afford to let her be overlooked.

Q. D. LEAVIS.

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'THE GREAT AND GOOD CORNEILLE'

I.

IT is Corneille's misfortune that no English writer has done for him what Lytton Strachey did for Racine. Whatever the shortcomings of Strachey's criticism, it did much to dispose of academic prejudice and to present Racine as a *poet*. It is true that Corneille has never aroused the same antipathy among English readers that Racine once did and that he has his place among the immortals on the Albert Memorial ; but it is also true that he has never enjoyed the relative popularity which came to Racine with the publication of Strachey's essay. The insistence of living critics that Racine is not merely a great poet, but a great *contemporary* poet, has brought him closer to us, while the figure of Corneille has receded farther and farther into the past. For many of us he has become a sort of historical monument, the lonely representative of a vanished civilization. His poetry suggests Versailles wi'h its vast porticoes and the rigid stone figures hiding coyly among the *bosquets* in its trim gardens, or—more formidable still—a scratch troupe from the Comédie Française dressed in those strange, those impossible accoutrements, which seem to be inseparable from the performance of high tragedy, declaiming the *Cid* to an audience of school-girls armed with the Hachette plain text. It is ironical to think that the veteran Rodrigue, a little hoarse of voice, a little 'gone in the knees,' who rants and stamps through five acts for the edification of the School Certificate class, should have become the symbol of the great writer who was all his life the champion of youth in revolt against the corruption and pretence of an older generation.

It is perhaps reassuring to find that this impression is not due entirely to insular prejudice and that Corneille's own countrymen have experienced similar difficulties. The most striking thing about the distinguished French critics of the last century is their profound dislike of the great masters of their own literature. Of Racine they could scarcely bring themselves to speak with patience. '*Bérénice*,' wrote Sainte-Beuve in a characteristic sally, '*peut*

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être dite une charmante et mélodieuse faiblesse dans l'œuvre de Racine, comme la Champmeslé le fut dans la vie.' In spite of Stendhal's timely championship of 'the great and good Corneille,' Corneille himself fared no better. 'I admire his characters,' said Taine, 'but from a distance: I should not care to live with any of them.' '*C'est beau, admirable, sublime, ce n'est ni humain, ni vivant, ni réel,*' said Brunetière.

That was the verdict of the nineteenth century. Corneille was widely recognized as 'The Father of French Tragedy,' but he had become the professor's poet—a 'classic' whose proper place was not the playbill, but the examination syllabus. Racine has long since come into his own, but it has been left to the younger French critics of our own day to discover in this staid classic, whose *Horace* delights, or is supposed to delight, the populace at the free matinée on Armistice Day, a much more exciting figure. According to the latest of his critics, Corneille's world is not a world of flourishes and lofty feelings. It is a world of corruption and intrigue inhabited by doddering, time-serving fathers and criminal stepmothers plotting the ruin of their children who are drawn with a ferocity that is worthy of Racine.[1]

There is, perhaps, a danger of exaggerating the sensational element in Corneille and the reason is not hard to discover. Contemporary admirers are a little too anxious to profit by the immense popularity of Racine and to point out similarities between the two writers, though it is clearly the differences which ought to detain us. One of the most important of these differences is brought out in the first chapter of M. Jean Schlumberger's valuable study[2] when he speaks of the contrast between

> 'Un art héroique et un art de jouissance ou de connaissance pure, un art qui construit une image exemplaire de l'homme, et un art qui la défait par l'analyse et le raffinement.'

It is a curious fact that few French critics manage to be fair to both poets and that their 'rivalry,' which is merely of historical

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[1] *Pierre Corneille*, by Robert Brasillach (Fayard, 1938, Fr. 20). This is a stimulating though unequal book; and the author takes nearly 500 pages to say what might easily have been said in 300.
[2] *Plaisir à Corneille: Promenade anthologique* (Gallimard, 1936).

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interest, still influences critical opinion. Stendhal spoilt his defence of Corneille by declaring roundly that he was 'immensely above Racine'; and it is one of the drawbacks of M. Schlumberger's study that he is inclined to diminish Racine's greatness in order to make his defence of Corneille more convincing. This is surely a mistake. No one seriously believes that he is as great a poet as Racine, but they are not 'rivals' and they are not interchangeable. Without Corneille there would be a gap in French literature which Racine could never have filled.

Racine belongs to a period of transition from the old order to the new, from the old social solidarity to the new individualism. His impact on French poetry produced what was virtually a change of direction—a movement away from all that Corneille stood for—and for this reason he seems to me to be much more the predecessor of Baudelaire than the successor of Corneille. Corneille is not in himself a difficult poet, but an appreciation of his poetry has been made difficult by changing circumstances. He is more than most other great poets the test of a catholic taste in poetry because to enjoy him it is necessary to realize that poetry may be 'sublime' *and* 'human, living and real.' He wrote heroic plays and it is as an heroic poet that he stands or falls. A criticism of his work is primarily an elucidation of this uncomfortable term. M. Schlumberger's suggestion that an appreciation of Corneille involves an appreciation of Hugo and Claudel seems to me a strategic error, and Croce's invitation to us to discard Corneille's four principal plays and to discover the true Corneille—Corneille the Poet—in the final plays simply shirks all the difficulties.

II.

Corneille's achievement becomes more comprehensible when we consider it in relation to contemporary society. The reign of Louis XIII opened appropriately with an assassination. France was governed by a despotism, but an uneasy despotism. The first part of the century, indeed, is dominated by the figure of Richelieu. The spectacle of Richelieu entering La Rochelle at the head of the King's troops to celebrate the Mass of thanksgiving for the fall of the town is a symbol of the contradictions of the age and of its strange mixture of piety and opportunism. It was an age of rival factions and incredible intrigues, an age that delighted in great

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exploits and violent actions. France had been shaken to the core by the religious wars of the previous century ; and though the worst of them were over, the country was still split in two by the conflict between Catholic and Protestant. It was also a period of intense religious revival in which the chief figures were St. Francis of Sales and St. Vincent de Paul. Although it has seemed to later generations that theology and philosophy parted company in the seventeenth century, to Corneille's contemporaries there seemed to be no conflict between the old religion and the ' new philosophy.' Descartes and the theologians were at one in their interest in human psychology and their preoccupation with moral problems ; and Bossuet and Pascal were both admirers of the Cartesian philosophy.

In Corneille's poetry all these different and sometimes contradictory elements found a place. The interest that he shows in family feuds in the *Cid*, in political intrigue in *Cinna* and religious dissensions in *Polyeucte* is clearly a reflection of events that were going on around him. The relation of a great poet to his time, however, is primarily a matter of temper, and it was left to Sainte-Beuve to put his finger on it in a sympathetic moment in his description of the famous *journée du guichet* in *Port-Royal*:

> ' C'est le même combat, c'est le même triomphe; si Polyeucte émeut et transporte, c'est que quelquechose de tel était et demeure possible encore à la nature humaine secourue. Je dis plus : si *Polyeucte* a été possible en son temps au génie de Corneille, c'est que quelquechose existait encore à l'entour (que Corneille le sût ou non) qui égalait et reproduisait les mêmes miracles.'[1]

The fact that internally France was in a state of turmoil undoubtedly produced a considerable effort towards consolidation.[2]

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[1] *Port-Royal*, T.II, p. 115. The *journée du guichet* was the day when Arnauld was refused admission to the Abbey by his daughter, the abbess, to prevent an unwarrantable interference with his children's vocation. Sainte-Beuve's words are still more significant when one remembers what a large part of Corneille's work was occupied with conflicts between parents and children.

[2] The propaganda for absolute monarchy, which is prominent in all Corneille's plays, seems to be a sign of the political uneasiness of the times and of the ' effort towards consolidation.'

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In spite of its contradictions, Corneille's age was in many ways an age of reconstruction. Corneille was clearly disposed by his early training at at Jesuit college, which left a lasting impress on his poetry, to sympathise with this spirit. A sense of effort, a striving towards a moral end seems to me to be the deepest thing in his poetry. It is well expressed in a characteristic couplet from one of Auguste's last speeches in *Cinna*:

> Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers ;
> Je le suis, je veux l'être.

In the first line we notice that the personal problem is related to the social one, and in the second that the statement is significantly followed by the aspiration.

A direct preoccupation with morality and the constant recurrence of words denoting moral qualities like *honneur*, *gloire*, *grand cœur* and *mâle assurance* are usually a sign of literary decadence—a sign that society is becoming self-conscious about qualities that it is in the process of losing. In Corneille this is not so. In his poetry, as surely as in Pope's, the words represent 'robust moral certitudes' which were the product of centuries of civilization and the common heritage of the people. France was engaged in setting her house in order, in trying to work out a fresh code after the upheavals of the previous century, and this produces a literature of great vitality. Corneille's heroes are not, as they are sometimes said to be, mere abstractions or metaphysical entities, but the embodiment of all that was best in the middle class from which the poet came. They are human beings realizing these aspirations in *action*. It is the integrity of this middle class—*la solide vertu*, as Horace calls it—which gives his poetry its personal idiom and its peculiar strength. For this reason Corneille's poetry, in spite of a certain narrowness, possesses a maturity of outlook which makes the lesser Elizabethans in England seem crude and immature by comparison.

The political triumphs of the latter part of Louis XIII's reign made possible the splendour and *external* stability of the reign of Louis XIV. They also account for some of the main differences in the poetry of the two periods. M. Schlumberger suggests that Corneille's work is the product of an age in which civilization was

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threatened and Racine's the product of an age of security, an age which encouraged disinterested speculation without the slightest necessity of translating thought into action. Racine's elegance belongs to a civilization which has reached its zenith, but a civilization which has within it the seeds of its own dissolution. Corneille's verse sometimes seems clumsy in comparison ; but it is a clumsiness which comes from living in a difficult age and not the clumsiness of a man who is not the master of his medium. It seems possible that Racine's age did not possess the same internal stability as Corneille's and that its moral fibre was perhaps less fine. I think that one might defend the view that Racine made greater poetry out of a poorer philosophy.

When we compare

> Il est doux de revoir les murs de la patrie
> (*Sertorius*)

with

> Dans le fond des forêts votre image me suit
> (*Phèdre*)

or

> Tous les monstres d'Egypte ont leurs temples dans Rome
> (*Polyeucte*)

with

> Dans L'Orient désert quel devint mon ennui
> (*Bérénice*)

or

> . . . sur mes passions ma raison souveraine
> Eût blâmé mes soupirs et dissipé ma haine
> (*Polyeucte*)

with

> Il n'est plus temps. Il sait mes ardeurs insensées.
> De l'austère pudeur les bornes sont passées.
> (*Phèdre*)

we may think that though Racine's lines are finer, they are not obviously more ' poetical.' It is clear, however, that the lines are the product of two very different sensibilities. Corneille limits and defines and finally sets a particular feeling against its background. Racine's method is a process of infinite suggestion ; the lines seem

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to expand in the mind, to set up waves of feeling that become more and more subtle and elusive. In the first line *patrie* has a precise geographical connotation and limits the emotion to a definite area. In the second there is no barrier ; *fond* suggests an infinite extension which has no limit and no term. In the third line—a description of the perverse Eastern cults which are tolerated in Rome while Christianity is persecuted—Corneille deliberately strips the East of the sort of glamour with which Racine's *Orient désert* invests it. The squalor and degeneracy of the East are set against the moral integrity which Rome often suggests in Corneille's poetry. In the last example, the ' barrier ' is purely a moral one ; but the *raison souveraine* (which is deliberately placed after *passions*) is so vividly apprehended by the poet that it gives us a sense of physical repression. In Racine's couplet, on the contrary, the limit is only mentioned in order to tell us that it has long since been exceeded.

The differences become still more striking when we compare longer passages :

> Quoique pour ce vainqueur mon amour s'intéresse,
> Quoiqu'un peuple l'adore et qu'un roi le caresse,
> Qu'il soit environné des plus vaillants guerriers,
> J'irai sous mes cyprès accabler ses lauriers.
>
> (*Le Cid*).

> Je le vis, je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue :
> Un trouble s'éleva dans mon âme éperdue ;
> Mes yeux ne voyaient plus, je ne pouvais parler,
> Je sentis tout mon corps et transir et brûler.
>
> (*Phèdre*).

The speakers in both passages are the victims of a conflict between what might provisionally be called ' duty ' and ' inclination.' In Racine Phèdre's personality crumbles and disintegrates at once ; the emotion of the passage is split up into its component parts, but though there is analysis there is no synthesis. ' There is nothing in her mind,' said Rivière of a character in *Andromaque*, ' which properly speaking acts as a dam against the wave of love except a contrary wave, which one may call anger, spite, hate or what you will, but which at bottom . . . is of the same nature and

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the same stuff as the passion against which it is pitted.'[1] Chimène's character is different. She is not passive, but active. The two conflicting impulses are balanced against one another and the conflict resolved by the will acting in obedience to a principle. There is nothing specious about it: the solution springs necessarily from the *données*.

The great passage from which Racine's lines are taken has been discussed in another article.[2] I must now record that the four lines from the *Cid* seem to me to be one of the glories of Corneille's poetry. The first three lines have an extraordinary lyrical *élan* which is intensified by the obvious sexual connotation of *intéresse*, *adore*, *caresse*, and the suggestion of ' action ' and ' vitality ' contained in *vainqueur* and *guerriers*. This feeling of expansion, this sense of personal liberation that comes from the momentary identification of Chimène with Rodrigue and his exploits, is suddenly checked by something altogether impersonal in the last line. The spreading foliage of the cypresses, with their sinister hint of darkness and death, comes down like a pall and stifles the ' life ' which is now concentrated in *lauriers*. The final effect of the passage, however, is not negative. The emotion of the first three lines is skilfully transformed so that the last line has behind it the force of the whole passage. It should be noticed that there is no casuistry and no argument here: Corneille's method is purely a poetic one and depends on the opposition of *cyprès* and *lauriers* and the triumphant use of the word *accabler*. The image in the last line is fully adequate to the emotion ; it stands out against the sober background of Corneille's verse and glows with a sombre splendour.

I hope that these comparisons have given some indication of the structure of Corneille's world. It is a finite world whose geographical boundaries are marked with such clarity that we sometimes have a feeling of almost physical oppression in reading him. His conception of the nature of man is defined with the mathematical precision of Descartes' *Traité des passions de l'âme* which gives his poetry its certainty and forthrightness. He is only interested in a few aspects of human nature and therefore only

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[1] *Moralisme et littérature*, p. 28.

[2] See *Scrutiny* for March, 1938, pp. 455-7.

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master of a limited range of emotion.[1] Within these limits he is a great writer, but when he ventures outside them the results are disastrous. He is, it need hardly be said, a more pedestrian writer than Racine, and the hard, metallic clang of his verse is a strong contrast to Racine's sensuous, flexible rhythm. There are no surprises in his poetry, none of those sudden glimpses into a sub conscious world of primitive instinct that we get in Racine. For Corneille's aim, as we shall see, was to bring that world of primitive instinct under the dominion of reason before reason was overthrown by it and society reduced to a state of chaos. Corneille's vocabulary was no smaller than Racine's, but it is probable that he had less power of suggestion than any other great French poet. Words are scientific terms which mean exactly what they say. He did not possess Racine's astonishing gift of revealing mysterious depths with the most commonplace words as, for example, when Hippolyte says:

Je me suis engagé trop avant.
Je vois que la raison cède à la violence.

Corneille's four most famous plays are really variations on the same theme. They show the Cornelian hero in relation to the code of chivalry, to patriotism, to politics and finally to religion. In the later plays there is no doubt that Corneille was sometimes inclined to play the showman and to write without any inner compulsion and it is this, perhaps, that has led critics to say that his characters are artful mechanical contrivances without contact with living experience. The simplicity of his psychology and the ease with which he could define his position have undoubtedly lent currency to this view. In a remarkable passage in the Epistle Dedicatory to *La Place Royale* he wrote:

> 'C'est de vous que j'ai appris que l'amour d'un honnête homme doit être toujours volontaire ; que l'on ne doit jamais aimer en un tel point qu'on ne puisse n'aimer pas ; que si on en vient jusque-là, c'est une tyrannie dont il faut secouer le joug . . . '

[1]It is probably this tendency to select, to isolate emotion, which is responsible for the sense of remoteness from common experience that we sometimes have in reading Corneille, and it may have inspired the criticisms of Taine and Brunetière given above.

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This is a statement of principle which underlies the whole of Corneille's work, and our opinion of him as a poet depends ultimately on whether it is a living principle that produces vital poetry or an assumed position which led to a frigid formalism. It is plain that we have here a conception of love which is completely opposed to the one that dominates the poetry of Racine and of almost every great French poet who has since written. For Racine and his successors love was essentially what Corneille describes in the same dedication as *une inclination aveugle*. Hostile critics have always maintained that Corneille's was an artificial system deliberately imposed on living experience. Its authenticity can only be fully tested by an examination of Corneille's verse, but there are two reservations, both more or less theoretical, which should be made. The first is that the view of passion contained in Racine's poetry has become so much a part of our consciousness that we are no longer capable of approaching Corneille with an open mind. And the second is that although the code of honour on which the *Cid* is based may no longer seem valid, the poetry it once inspired is not affected by changing standards.

III.

Corneille's poetry has been variously described as a conflict between ' love and honour,' as a ' drama of the will ' or as mere stoicism. All these views have been challenged at one time or another ; but though it is true that a great poet's work can never be summed up in a single formula, these views may serve as pointers in examining his work as long as they are not too rigidly interpreted. ' Love and honour ' was a favourite theme in literature of chivalry and it is interesting to see how Corneille extends its significance. The central fact in the *Cid* is a duel—the single combat between two ' men of honour.' It has not been sufficiently remarked that far from being a picturesque incident, the duel is a symbol of the whole play and indeed of all Corneille's poetry.

Don Rodrigue :

A moi, comte, deux mots.

Le Comte :

Parle.

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Don Rodrigue :

Ote-moi d'un doute.
Connais-tu bien don Diègue?

Le Comte :

Oui.

Don Rodrigue :

Parlons bas ; écoute.
Sais-tu que ce vieillard fut la même vertu,
La vaillance et l'honneur de son temps? le sais-tu?

Le Comte :

Peut-être.

Don Rodrigue :

Cette ardeur que dans les yeux je porte,
Sais-tu que c'est son sang? le sais-tu?

Le Comte :

Que m'importe?

Don Rodrigue :

A quatre pas d'ici je te le fais savoir.

Le Comte :

Jeune présomptueux!

Don Rodrigue :

Parle sans t'émouvoir.
Je suis jeune, il est vrai ; mais aux âmes bien nées
La valeur n'attend point le nombre des années . . .

Le Comte :

Retire-toi d'ici.

Don Rodrigue :

Marchons sans discourir.

Le Comte :

Es-tu si las de vivre?

Don Rodrigue :

As-tu peur de mourir?

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In this admirable scene we hear the thrust and parry of the rapiers—the hiss of steel in the

> Sais-tu que c'est son sang? le sais-tu?

and we hear it all through the play. It is the duel that is evoked at the height of the drama in Chimène's

> Dedans mon ennemi je trouve mon amant ;
> Et je sens qu'en dépit de toute ma colère,
> Rodrigue dans mon cœur combat encor mon père :
> Il l'attaque, il le presse, il cede, il se défend,
> Tantôt fort, tantôt faible, et tantôt triomphant :
> Mais, en ce dur combat de colère et de flamme,
> Il déchire mon cœur sans partager mon âme . . .

The thrust and parry of the duel merges into the movement of consciousness, into the conflict between *amour* and *devoir* and this gives the play its unity. These passages reflect the movement of all Corneille's verse—a simple movement befitting a simple psychology. We feel it again, for example, in these lines from *Polyeucte* where the ' duel ' is purely an interior one.

> *Polyeucte :*
> C'est peu d'aller au ciel, je vous y veux conduire.
> *Pauline :*
> Imaginations!
> *Polyeucte :*
> Célestes vérités!
> *Pauline :*
> Étrange aveuglement!
> *Polyeucte :*
> Éternelles clartés!

It is possible to see now how Corneille extends the significance of love and honour. The movement of his verse is not a destructive movement and the conflict does not end, as it usually does in tragedy, in the destruction of the characters. Nor is it true to say, as Lemaître and other French critics have said, that Corneille's poetry is simply a glorification of will and power for their own sake. There is always a definite aim in view, a process in which

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new values are forged, the human material re-shaped and given a fresh direction. Honour is not merely a symbol of reason, it stands for the principle of order which has to be imposed on the chaos of unruly desires, on the whole of the instinctive life which Corneille constantly refers to as *les sens*. The real theme of his poetry therefore is not a simple clash between duty and inclination, but the subordination of one set of values to another which leads to the creation of a fresh order.

The background of Corneille's drama is aristocratic, the life of the court. In each of his major works the even flow of this life is disturbed by a shock—by the duel in the *Cid*, a conspiracy in *Cinna*, a conversion in *Polyeucte*. The effect of the shock and the conflict which is set up is to reveal the Cornelian hero to himself in a new way. The court life is seen to be conventional and unreal ; and it is only when the convention is disturbed that the characters come into contact with the vital experience which is hidden beneath the outer husk and the mechanical code of honour is transformed into something living.

Corneille's drama, particularly the *Cid*, is always a drama of initiation. Fresh claims are made on human nature and it undergoes a change. In the opening scene of the *Cid* Chimène says to her *confidente* :

> Dis-moi donc, je te prie, une seconde fois
> Ce qui te fait juger qu'il approuve mon choix.

It is the voice of a child asking to be told over again that her father approves of her young man. In the second act she says to the Infanta

> Maudite ambition, détestable manie,
> Dont les plus généreux souffrent la tyrannie!

This time it is the voice of a mature woman criticizing the values she is called upon to accept ; and the alexandrine registers the change of tone with remarkable delicacy.

The sudden contact with life produces in the Cornelian heroes a peculiar self-knowledge

> Je *sais* ce que je suis, et que mon père est mort

cries Chimène.

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Mon père, je suis femme, et je *sais* ma faiblesse

says Pauline. This clairvoyance—this insight into their own feelings—gives Corneille's characters a poise, a centrality which are perhaps unique in European drama. The hero is always in imminent danger of being betrayed by the uprush of *les sens* which threaten to overturn reason and plunge him into chaos and disaster.

La surprise des sens n'abat point mon courage

says one of them, and it is precisely these *surprises* which are the condition of heroic virtue, of the *grand cœur*.

The theme of the *Cid* is the clash between two generations, the dilemma of youth thrown into a world made by its parents and called upon to accept its standards. It is one of the signs of Corneille's maturity that these standards are never accepted passively ; his attitude towards them is always critical. Honour is in constant danger of becoming inhuman and mechanical unless it is accompanied by a profound humanity which is always referred to by the word *généreux*. When Don Diègue says:

Nous n'avons qu'un honneur, il est tant de maîtresses!
L'amour n'est qu'un plaisir, l'honneur est un devoir.

the cynical slickness of the lines and the facile epigram are certainly ironic. *Honneur* and *devoir* are turned into counters which no longer correspond to any moral experience. For Don Diègue expresses something which is incompatible with the Cornelian view of life. The combat does not destroy *les sens*, it dominates them in order to incorporate them into a definite hierarchy—a hierarchy which would be ruined if they were predominant, but which would be hollow and incomplete without them, as the world of Don Diègue and the Horaces is hollow and incomplete.

The criticism in *Horace* is of a far more drastic nature. The play becomes in the person of Camille—one of Corneille's most extraordinary creations—a harsh and angry indictment of the whole system:

Rome, l'unique objet de mon ressentiment!
Rome, à qui vient ton bras d'immoler mon amant!
Rome qui t'a vu naître, et que ton cœur adore!
Rome enfin que je hais parce qu'elle t'honore!

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Puissent tous ses voisins ensemble conjurés
Saper ses fondements encor mal assurés! . . .

The heavy, monotonous verse suggests the terrible machine remorselessly sacrificing humanity to an empty phantom. It is not easy to decide how far Corneille ever accepted his own sanctions, but it seems clear that they were valued as a means to a richer and a fuller life, not as an end in themselves. The struggle towards a new synthesis produces some of Corneille's finest and subtlest verse:

Ma raison, il est vrai, dompte mes sentiments ;
Mais quelque autorité que sur eux elle ait prise,
Elle n'y règne pas, elle les tyrannise ;
Et qucique le dehors soit sans émotion,
Le dedans n'est que trouble est que sédition.
Un je ne sais quel charme encor vers vous m'emporte ;
Votre mérite est grand, si ma raison est forte:
Je le vois encor tel qu'il alluma mes feux,
D'autant plus puissamment solliciter mes vœux,
Qu'il est environné de puissance et de gloire . . .
Mais ce même devoir qui le vainquit dans Rome,
Et qui me range ici dessous les lois d'un homme,
Repousse encor si bien l'effort de tant d'appas,
Qu'il déchire mon âme et ne l'ébranle pas.[1]

This passage with its inversions, its verbs deliberately piled at the end of the lines, is a remarkable example of the pitiless self-inquisition to which the Cornelian heroes are subjected. There is a deliberate and calculated clumsiness about the verse which admirably expresses the immense effort that the speaker is making to dominate her feelings. The passage gets its life from the constant alteration of tone—the change from a note of defiance and determination to the half-whispered reflections of lines 6-8. The merits

[1]The context is important. The speech comes from the meeting between Pauline and Sévère, the admirer whom she had been obliged to give up in obedience to her father's wish for her to marry Polyeucte, and who now returns from the wars (where he has been consoling himself) covered in glory and the Emperor's favourite.

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of Sévère are carefully catalogued and balanced against the claims of reason until one has the feeling that Pauline is being gradually engulfed in a vast stream which threatens to dislodge her at any moment. In the line

D'autant plus puissament solliciter mes feux

the hiss of the s's suggests the voluptuous element, the tug of *les sens*. Then, at the moment when she seems lost, there is a sudden shifting of the tension in the victorious

Repousse encor si bien l'effet de tant d'appas,
Qu'il déchire mon âme et ne l'ébranle pas.

This dramatic assertion of the will is, as I have already suggested, one of the most striking characteristics of Corneille's poetry ; and it seems to me that it is here rather than in the famous *Qu'il mourût !* that we detect the authentic heroic note. It is a note that we hear not once, but many times in every play. It does not lower the tension or resolve the conflict, but produces a marked increase of life and vitality that enables the Cornelian hero to ' carry on.'

From this we may turn to Pauline's speech at the beginning of Act III.

Que de soucis flottants, que de confus nuages
Présentent à mes yeux d'inconstantes images!
Douce tranquillité, que je n'ose espérer,
Que ton divin rayon tarde à les éclairer!
Mille agitations, que mes troubles produisent,
Dans mon cœur ébranlé tour à tour se détruisent:
Aucun espoir n'y coule où j'ose persister ;
Aucun effroi n'y règne où j'ose m'arrêter.
Mon esprit, embrassant tout ce qu'il s'imagine,
Voit tantôt mon bonheur, et tantôt ma ruine,
Et suit leur vaine idée avec si peu d'effet,
Qu'il ne peut espérer ni craindre tout à fait.
Sévère incessamment brouille ma fantaisie:
J'espère en sa vertu, je crains sa jalousie ;
Et je n'ose penser que d'un œil bien égal
Polyeucte en ces lieux puisse voir son rival.

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'This is half-way to poetry,' remarks a university lecturer patronisingly.[1] It seems to me to be a good deal more than that. It seems to me to be not only dramatically effective, but to be something to which we can hardly refuse the title of great poetry. The same writer complains that 'the metaphors and images are confused,' but the confusion does not seem to me to lie in Corneille's imagery. For the success of the passage depends very largely on the skill with which the poet presents 'a whole of tangled feelings.' The focal point of the passage is the image of the conflicting feelings dissolving into and destroying one another. The words *soucis flottants, confus nuages, inconstantes images* suggest a state of complete instability which is accompanied by a desperate longing for the elusive stability promised by *douce tranquillité, persister, arrêter* ; but there is no security anywhere. Whatever Pauline tries to cling on to dissolves into mere *fantaisie*. For here the words 'seem to do what they say' as surely as in the finest English poetry of the same period. Pauline's mind is battered into a state of immobility. She is acutely aware of what she feels, but in the midst of the tumult of warring impulses she is passive and unable to act. Only a dumb determination to 'hang on' persists and gives the poetry its vitality. The tension of the passage does not depend, as it does in Racine, on the sickening sense of complete collapse, but on the rigid immobility—the numbness between the metal walls of the alexandrine—which prevents action amid the swirl of the rapidly changing feelings going on around it.

Although the passages I have discussed come from different plays, they illustrate the stages in the evolution of Corneille's characters which scarcely varies from one play to another. It is evident that this evolution is as different from Racine as it could well be. In Racine there is a violent conflict, but it does not end in the creation of fresh moral values or the renewal of life ; it is a conflict in which 'honour' (which for Racine is not a *principle*, but a *feeling*) is beaten every time. Corneille is inferior to Racine as a psychologist, but he seems to me to reveal a greater range of what is commonly called 'character.' Racine concentrates all his attention on the moral crisis and there is nothing in his work

[1] *Poetry in France and England*, by Jean Stewart (Hogarth Lectures, 1931), p. 52.

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which is comparable to the moral growth that takes place in Corneille's. The final change, when it does come, appears as a flash of illumination which transcends all the separate acts and the different phases of the drama which lead up to it. One example is Auguste's sudden realization of his place in the existing order:

> Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers ;
> Je le suis, je veux l'être.

Another is the remarkable description of one of the conversions in *Polyeucte*:

> Je m'y trouve forcé par un secret appas ;
> Je cède à des transports que je ne connais pas . . .

I should be shirking a difficulty if I failed to mention the celebrated encounter between Rodrigue and Chimène in Act III Scene (iv). This scene—too long to set out here—seemed to Corneille's age a masterpiece of pathos. M. Schlumberger cannot resist the temptation to quote it, and M. Brasillach subjects it to an enthusiastic analysis. My own opinion, for what it is worth, is that Corneille was not a master of pathos and that though the scene contains good passages, the most admired parts are tiresome and embarrassing. They are an example of what happens when Corneille ventures outside his prescribed limits. It must of course be remembered that his verse was written to be declaimed and that lines which are embarrassing in the study may sound very well on the stage. It is one of the shortcomings of the grand manner that it does allow the poet to ' fake ' emotion, to rely on the sweep of the alexandrine when there is no correspondence between his personal sensibility and the emotion he is staging.

IV.

The *Cid* has always been Corneille's most popular play and it possesses the peculiar beauty which belongs to the first work of a great writer's maturity ; but the plays which followed it also possess a vision, a complexity, that we do not find in the *Cid*. It has been pointed out that the discovery of Rome was an event of the first importance in Corneille's development, but its importance is not always understood. Corneille dealt with Rome at several

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different periods of her history and his attitude towards her varied, but the most impressive of the Roman plays is perhaps *Cinna*. The *Cid* is the most individualistic, the most 'romantic' of his works. It does not possess, that is to say, any coherent view of society. There is simply the life of the court with its etiquette and conventions. *Cinna* is far from being a faultless play, but there does emerge from it a definite conception of society—something which can, I think, not unreasonably be called a social order. We must not expect to find in French drama the sort of picture of contemporary life that we get in English. French tragedy was essentially the product of an intellectual aristocracy. There was no place for *le peuple* whom Corneille regarded as creatures of instinct in whose life reason played little part. The social order which emerges from *Cinna* is therefore concerned with the problems of the ruling class, for it is assumed—not unnaturally—that reconstruction starts from above. The advance in Corneille's art is apparent from the great speech of Auguste who in the second act significantly displaces Cinna as the hero.

Cet empire absolu sur la terre et sur l'onde,
Ce pouvoir souverain que j'ai sur tout le monde,
Cette grandeur sans borne et cet illustre rang,
Qui m'a jadis coûté tant de peine et de sang,
Enfin tout ce qu'adore en ma haute fortune
D'un courtisan flatteur la présence importune,
N'est que de ces beautés dont l'éclat éblouit,
Et qu'on cesse d'aimer sitôt qu'on en jouit.
L'ambition déplaît quand elle est assouvie,
D'une contraire ardeur son ardeur est suivie ;
Et comme notre esprit, jusqu'au dernier soupir,
Toujours vers quelque objet pousse quelque désir,
Il se ramène en soi, n'ayant plus où se prendre,
Et monté sur le faîte, il aspire à descendre.
J'ai souhaité l'empire, et j'y suis parvenu ;
Mais en le souhaitant, je ne l'ai pas connu :
Dans sa possession j'ai trouvé pour tous charmes
D'effroyables soucis, d'éternelles alarmes,
Mille ennemis secrets, la mort à tout propos,
Point de plaisir sans trouble, et jamais de repos.

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It is one of the finest examples of Corneille's handling of the grand style. Without any rhetoric, the *ampleur* of the style and the regular thud of the end-rhymes contrive to suggest a stable order. For there are two voices speaking in this passage—the voice of the lonely, harassed individual debating whether to give up his throne, and what one may call the public voice. It is no longer simply a matter of coming to terms with oneself or of satisfying accepted standards of honour, but of playing a part in society. *Cinna* is a drama of adjustment. The individual experience has to fit in with the experience of the community and the drama is only complete when this is accomplished. In *Cinna* therefore there is a blending of the political and the moral problems. It is not simply that all political problems are seen to involve a moral problem, but that in transforming moral problems into political problems Corneille gives them a wider context and immensely increases the import of his poetry ; and this makes his approach extremely actual to-day. In the great political discussion at the beginning of Act II one is aware of a straightening out of the emotions and order, which is so often discussed and so seldom defined, becomes something almost tangible.

Although Corneille's contemporaries thought of him as the author of *Cinna*, many modern French critics consider that *Nicomède* is the finest of the political plays. The passion of the Latin mind for the ' well made play ' may have something to do with this preference, but *Nicomède* is an extraordinary ironic *tour de force* which deserves to be better known than it is in England. ' Tenderness and passion have no part in it,' said Corneille in his Dedication. ' My chief aim has been to paint Roman politics in their external relations.' He sets his ' cool and efficient hero '—the language of the best-seller is somehow appropriate—against the background of political intrigue and proceeds, very skilfully, to ' debunk ' the large pretensions of Rome and her predatory designs on smaller countries. Nicomède's ruthless sardonic humour gives the play its peculiar flavour. Ostensibly he is trying to bolster up his father and make him resist the demands of Rome ; but there is an undercurrent of resentment which spares neither Prusias's inefficiency nor his senile passion for his second wife.

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Prusias :

Quelle bassesse d'âme,
Quelle fureur t'aveugle en faveur d'une femme?
Tu la préfères, lâche! à ces prix glorieux
Que ta valeur unit au bien de tes aieux! . . .

Nicomède:

Je crois que votre example est glorieux à suivre . . .
. . . . . .
Pardonnez-moi ce mot, il est fâcheux à dire,
Mais un monarque enfin comme un autre homme expire . .

He carefully points the contrast between the office of king and its present occupant. The *expire*, with its suggestions of the funeral cortège, the vast mausoleum with the appropriate inscriptions, reveals the fatuity of the person who will be buried there. Prusias is a richly comic figure and has a definite place in Corneille's survey of seventeenth-century society. In the *Cid* and *Horace* he exposed an 'honour' which had become mechanical and inhuman. Through Félix (in *Polyeucte*) and Prusias he makes the essential criticisms of middle-class complacency—of the moral corruption which prevents the realization of Cornelian 'honour.'

A word must be said about a more debatable side of Corneille's poetry—the religious side. Some critics have denied that he is properly speaking a religious poet at all, while others have described *Polyeucte*, which is certainly his greatest play, as a masterpiece of religious poetry. It must be recorded with gratitude that it is refreshingly free from the incorrigibly romantic attitude towards sin that we find in a living Catholic writer like M. Mauriac ; but in spite of its subject it is probably neither more nor less religious than any of Corneille's other works. What is religious in all Corneille's best work is not the subject or the setting, but his sense of society as an ordered whole and man as a member of this hierarchy. If he tried to round the picture off in *Polyeucte* by presenting the natural order in the light of the supernatural, it seems to me that he failed. It is significant that in this play the fable was modified to fit the usual Cornelian formula and we are left with the feeling that the religion was not inevitable, but that any other motif might have produced an equally great play.

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Corneille's world remains a circumscribed world and his religion does not extend the field of his experience as it clearly ought to have done.

It should be clear by now in what sense Corneille is an heroic poet. It has nothing to do with declamation and bombast (though there is plenty of both in his work), or with the misleading theory that his characters are supermen. It simply means that by a combination of insight and will power the moral values which Corneille derived from close contact with his class are raised in his poetry to a high level of intensity. He was a great poet because he expressed something that is permanent in human nature and because he had the whole weight of what was best in contemporary society behind him. One only has to compare him with Dryden to see the difference. For Dryden's age was not an heroic age and in trying to write heroic plays he was simply going against the spirit of his time. His drama is an example of the false sublime, of the stucco façade which ill conceals the viciousness and corruption beneath.

In his laborious commentary on Aristotle Corneille argued that tragedy should compel our 'admiration.' The need to admire is a primitive instinct in man, and when we compare what the seventeenth century admired with the contemporary prostration before film stars and record-breakers, we get some idea of the disastrous changes that have overtaken civilization.

V.

Corneille's later plays have been the subject of considerable controversy. Contemporary apologists like M. Schlumberger take up their stand against the traditional view which regards the later plays, in Lytton Strachey's words, as 'miserable failures.' M. Pierre Lièvre's Introduction to his admirable edition of the complete plays[1] is an eloquent plea that Corneille's work should be treated as a whole, as a steady development from the early comedies to the final tragedies. I confess that I find it difficult

[1] *Théâtre Complet* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), Gallimard, 1934, 2 vols. Fr. 160. This is much the most satisfactory edition of Corneille for ordinary purposes.

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to accept this view. Plays like *Rodogune* and *Pompée*, which belong to the third period that lasts from 1644 to 1669, contain fine things, but compared with Corneille's best work they show a falling off. There is, perhaps, a greater breadth of characterization, but the poetry is less impressive. The fact that Corneille never stood still and never repeated himself may account for the difficulty. With *Polyeucte* the Cornelian hero is complete and there is no room for further development along those lines. The poet loses interest in the hero who degenerates into a mechanical warrior—*Attila* is the worst example—and concentrates on the persons who surround him. The main interest of the plays of this period lies in the amazons like Rodogune, Cornélie and the two Cléopâtres. This produces an alteration in the quality of the verse. Corneille develops the vein of rhetoric which is already visible in the *Cid*:

> Paraissez, Navarrois, Mores et Castillans,
> Et tout ce que l'Espagne a nourri de vaillants ;
> Unissez-vous ensemble, et faites une armée,
> Pour combattre une main de la sorte animée . . .

In *Rodogune* this becomes the staple of the whole play:

> Serments fallacieux, salutaire contrainte,
> Que m'imposa la force et qu'accepta ma crainte,
> Heureux déguisements d'un immortel courroux,
> Vains fantômes d'Etat, évanouissez-vous!

There is a natural tendency to rhetoric in French poetry—to use words as mere labels and rely for the 'poetry' on the drive of the alexandrine. Certainly there is no lack of drive in *Rodogune*, but there is a loss of subtlety and a marked coarseness of texture in the verse.

Although M. Schlumberger has apparently abandoned the view that the last plays of all are the crown of Corneille's work, he still gives *Pulchérie* and *Suréna* a high place. In these plays there is a return to the old Cornelian formula which was to some extent abandoned in the plays of the middle period. He sees in them a tenderness and serenity which he does not find in any of Corneille's other work. This may be so, but one cannot help wondering

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whether they deserve all the praise they get. Consider, for example, the opening speech of *Pulchérie*:

> Je vous aime, Léon, et n'en fais point mystère:
> Des feux tels que les miens n'ont rien qu'il faille taire.
> Je vous aime, et non point de cette folle ardeur
> Que les yeux éblouis font maîtresse du cœur,
> Non d'un amour conçu par les sens en tumulte,
> A qui l'âme applaudit sans qu'elle se consulte,
> Et qui ne concevant que d'aveugles désirs,
> Languit dans les faveurs, et meurt dans les plaisirs:
> Ma passion pour vous, généreuse et solide,
> A la vertu pour âme, et la raison pour guide,
> La gloire pour objet, et veut sous votre loi
> Mettre en ce jour illustre et l'univers et moi.

According to Croce this passage marks the summit of Corneille's poetry and, with lofty assumption of philosophical detachment, he proceeds to commend Pulchérie's attitude to physical love. It is not difficult to see why this passage appeals to one whose criterion is evidently 'simple, sensuous and passionate.' It is by no means a negligible piece of verse, but it owes its charm to a subtle flavour of dissolution. The difficulty that one feels might be put by saying that honour wins too easily. It is clear from the looseness of texture, the slackness of the versification, that we are a long way from the poet of *Polyeucte*. It is the work of an old man, of a great poet in decline. Nor can one share Croce's enthusiasm for the content. For who but a survival of nineteenth-century romanticism can feel any sympathy for the bloodless spinster high-mindedly giving up her lover to contract a 'chaste' alliance with her father's agèd counsellor?

What is to be the final estimate? 'Corneille,' answers M. Schlumberger, 'does not ask the supreme questions, neither does he attempt to answer them. If I give him a high place in my æsthetic there remains a vast region of myself in which I feel the need of other poets besides him.' It is clear that he lacks many of the qualities that we have come to expect of poetry. Certain fundamental truths were grasped with the clarity and tenacity of genius; he was a penetrating critic of the evils of the existing order; but his own vision was partial and incomplete and

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the order towards which he was struggling seems somehow indistinct. Yet his central experience—his sense of society as an ordered whole and man as a part of that hierarchy—has an important place in European literature and without him it would be incomplete. Of all the great masters Corneille is the most limited, but that he is a master we cannot doubt.

MARTIN TURNELL.

'TROILUS AND CRESSIDA'[1]

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA is not, on any view of Shakespeare's work, a successful play ; on the other hand, it is among the most interesting of his failures. Shakespeare's greatness did not express itself in the effortless creation of flawless masterpieces. His development is irregular, fitful, sometimes even uncertain. Every now and then we are conscious in his work of the decisive impact of some fresh aspect of experience, which disturbs the measure of harmony previously attained and is only gradually assimilated into a more complex artistic form. At such critical moments, the language of the plays seems to be charged with obscure and even contradictory meanings and to fit uneasily into verse forms that were fully adequate only at an earlier stage of development. In this very artistic disproportion, however, the critic can often detect the dominating interests of a whole phase of Shakespeare's career which stand out more clearly, as it were, from the inequalities of the work ; in the case of *Troilus and Cressida* we may even say that the tragic sensibility of the mature plays is in process of attaining self-consciousness.

A certain ambiguity and a keen sense of the incongruous are well known to be characteristic of the play. Different and often contrasted sets of feeling lie in it side by side, and the artistic impulse to bring order out of the conflicting elements is over-

[1]My debt to Mr. G. Wilson Knight's brilliant Essay on this play in *The Wheel of Fire* will be obvious to anyone who has read it. I also have to thank Messrs. Sands & Co. for permission to use certain portions from my book *Approach to Shakespeare*.

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shadowed by verbal incoherence and a stagnant ratiocination. It is important to realize from the first that *Troilus* is not a poetic unity, like the best of the plays which preceded it and the great tragedies which it foreshadows. It shows, like *Henry IV*, a consciously critical attitude towards heroic pretensions and false military idealism; but it also represents something which was in Shakespeare much less explicit—namely a tendency to associate this attitude with profound uncertainties and contradictions in his own experience. This uncertainty of purpose is already apparent in the Prologue, and especially in the peculiar mixture of Latin and vernacular elements in its vocabulary. The critical impulse of *Henry IV* is present behind the attempt to build up, with heavy rhetorical emphasis, a sense of the historical dignity of the conflict between Greeks and Trojans. We have 'the princes *orgulous*,' with their 'crownets regal' and their weighty 'ministers and instruments of war'; we have the 'strong *immures* of Troy' and the '*corresponsive* and fulfilling bolts' with which war is carried on. This heavy and artificial grandeur is clearly lacking in conviction and destined for deflation. On coming to consider the speech more carefully, however, we find that Shakespeare is at least as much involved in the convolutions of his own rhetoric as conscious of its underlying inadequacy. Successful satire obviously demands detachment from the thing satirized, an objectivity in presenting the victim of ridicule; but the pretentiousness of this verse is rather complicated than comic or grotesque, something neither accepted at its face value nor isolated previous to satirical demolition. Moreover, the vernacular elements of the speech, which might have been expected to convey Shakespeare's satiric comment in contrast to the heavy epic style, are almost as indirect in their references and obscure in their implications as the rhetoric with which they seem to be contrasted. They seem less to make an effective comment than to provide a further discordant element in an already uncertain mood; the possibilities of a telling contrast are distinctly compromised when the poet turns for a word meaning 'enclose,' not to current usage, but to 'sperr up,' an obscure borrowing from Chaucerian English. The general impression, in fact, is scarcely comic at all; the satiric purpose, in so far as it exists, is less direct and objective than a reflection of subtle discords in the mood of the author.

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This Prologue, then, conveys not so much an attitude of critical detachment and comment, as a deep-seated uncertainty of mood, in which the comic aim of *Henry IV* exists only as a single element modified by interests of a very different kind ; and these interests are not yet the subject of controlled artistic expression. Their nature is hinted at when the expectation of conflict on either side is described as 'tickling skittish spirits' ; besides the obvious frivolity of the epithet, which is plainly a reflection of satiric purpose, there is in 'tickling' a slight but definite suggestion of the restlessness of physical impulse.[1] This impression is confirmed in other parts of the speech. The Greek ships 'disgorge' their crews at Tenedos, and the Prologue speaks of presenting as much as 'may be *digested* in a play' ; it is notable that this play, in which the common Elizabethan association of 'appetite' with 'blood' or uncurbed desire is so prominent, should turn from the first to imagery drawn from the functioning of the digestive processes. Most prominent of all in this connection is the phrasing of the second line:

> The princes orgulous, their high blood chafed.'

Here the 'literary' and the vernacular elements in the vocabulary of *Troilus and Cressida* are seen in significant relationship. The strained rhetoric of 'the princes orgulous' is immediately qualified by the ambiguity of 'their high blood chafed,' where 'blood' can and does stand for lineage, but also represents in common Shakespearean usage the force of physical desire ; whilst 'chafed' is scarcely adapted to convey martial pride of birth but suggests perfectly the promptings of the flesh against the curb of discipline. The deduction from all this is clear. Shakespeare is no longer presenting a political world with detachment and objective clarity in the light of his comic vitality ; he is using the discords and the meannesses which he finds in the Trojan war to convey profound contradictions in his own experience.

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[1]Compare Ulysses'—

> O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
> That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
> And wide enclass the tables of their thoughts
> To every *ticklish* reader. (IV. v.)

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This change of attitude is reflected also in the structure of the play. The satirical approach is still apparent in the handling of the theme, but it remains as an inheritance from an earlier stage of development and is subordinated to new purposes. For Shakespeare, in the dramatic conception of *Troilus* no less than in the handling of its verse, is turning decisively away from the 'objective' presentation of incident and character and feeling his way towards the creation of a dramatic universe whose various parts are significant only in relationship to one another and to the interwoven threads of poetic imagery which bind them together ; in other words, he is moving towards the ' poetic drama ' of his maturity. Instead of a political conflict objectively studied and commented on by a character (such as Falstaff) who stands outside and transcends it, we have a personal issue—the story of Troilus and Cressida, two lovers of different and opposed parties—set in the context of the Trojan war. The situation of the two lovers, in whom the sensation of union and the consciousness of division seem, as we shall see, inextricably interwoven in a common experience, is closely connected with the cleavage between Greeks and Trojans ; and it is Shakespeare's intention to establish this connection by describing the political conflict through imagery which suggests disruptive tendencies within a single way of feeling. In other words, *Troilus and Cressida* is primarily a dramatic statement of the emotional ambiguity whose resolution was to be the motive of the great tragedies.

This ambiguity is clearly connected with the interests that were finding simultaneous expression in the Sonnets. *Troilus and Cressida* is Shakespeare's first attempt[1] to express in dramatic terms the ambiguous attitude towards human passion that emerges from his treatment of the Sonnet form. Taking as his starting-point the conventional theme of the Renaissance sonneteer—the union with his mistress desired by the poet—Shakespeare's most individual sonnets convert this theme into an apprehension of the simultaneous fulfilment and destruction of human values by Time. Time, which brings passion to its consummation, implies also and equally its decline ; for the union of love, the very desire for which is incon-

[1]Although there are important anticipations of its mood in earlier plays—notably in *Henry IV*—Part II.

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ceivable apart from its setting in Time, demands, as a necessary condition of happiness, an unattainable eternity. The desire for unity is inevitably preceded by the state of separation, and to this tragic separateness it equally inevitably returns:

> Let me confess that we two must be twain,
> Although our individual loves are one. (XXXVI.)

The action of Time, which is thus at once simultaneously creative and destructive, which both makes love possible and destroys it, is the unavoidable flaw at the heart of passion. *Troilus and Cressida* aims at a dramatic presentation of this contradiction and attempts to unite a personal tragedy and a political issue by a common poetic imagery reflecting the poet's dominating mood.

This flaw introduced by Time into human experience is clearly present in the central situation of our play—the love of Troilus for Cressida. The love-poetry of this play, especially when Cressida takes leave of her lover before going to the Greek camp, is different in kind from anything in the earlier plays:

Cressida: And is it true that I must go from Troy? . . .
Is it possible?

Troilus: And suddenly; where injury of chance
Puts back leave-taking, justles roughly by
All time of pause, rudely beguiles our lips
Of all rejoindure, forcibly prevents
Our lock'd embrasures, strangles our dear vows
Even in the birth of our own labouring breath;
We two, that with so many thousand sighs
Did buy each other, must poorly sell ourselves
With the rude brevity and discharge of one.
Injurious time now with a robber's haste
Crams his rich thievery up, he knows not how;
As many farewells as be stars in heaven,
With distinct breath and consign'd kisses to them,
He fumbles up into a loose adieu,
And scants us with a single famish'd kiss,
Distasted with the salt of broken tears. (IV. iv.)

The obvious verbal intricacy of this speech is related to the uncertainty and incoherence of the Prologue and helps to throw light

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upon it. The experience behind it is tremendously rich, endlessly elaborate, but the ordering of it is not equal to the complexity. The adverse action of time upon the parting lovers is represented by an astonishing number of verbs—' puts back,' ' justles roughly by,' ' rudely beguiles,' ' forcibly prevents,' ' strangles '—but the emotion does not *develop*, does not acquire added coherence in the expression. It remains simply a long and acutely sensed effort to express a single moment of conflicting feeling. It belongs, in fact, to a period in Shakespeare's development in which the keenness of his apprehension of certain elements of experience was not accompanied by a corresponding sense of order and significance within the complexity of his imagery ; for the attainment of that order and significance in Shakespeare's love-poetry we must wait until *Antony and Cleopatra*.

None the less, although unsatisfactory, the experience behind these lines is highly individual. In each of the verbs of parting which we have just collected there is an element of harsh and hostile physical contact. This laboured feeling is not accidental, not simply a product of inadequate poetic equipment struggling for expression ; it is the product of a genuine conflict in the poet's experience and conveys its full meaning only in the light of the poignant thinness of the love-imagery in the same speech. Troilus, as in every other similar utterance of his, can only express his passion in images that are intense, but airy and essentially bodiless. Love is felt to be ' rich ' and fit to be mentioned with the ' stars of heaven ' ; but it can be expressed only in terms of ' sighs,' of ' laboured *breath*,' in the hurried breathlessness of ' distinct *breath* and consign'd kisses,' and in the intensely palated but transitory delicacy of ' Distasted with the salt of broken tears.' Opposed to this ' airy,' pathetic passion we feel the full brunt of the senses in every phrase that stresses parting ; ' roughly,' ' rudely,' ' forcibly,' time and hostile circumstances undermine the ' brevity ' of love. Most noticeable of all, the ' locked embrasures ' which should normally convey the intensity of physical union in love, are felt only as an effort to snatch a moment's union in the face of events which are forcibly drawing the lovers apart. Moreover, the keen nervous contrasts upon which the whole passage depends make us feel that the parting caused by external circumstance is only subsidiary to a certain weakness inherent in

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passion itself. The ideal, which is perfect union, exists and is felt intensely, but is as light as 'breath' or 'air'; and the bodies through whose union alone this intensity can be gained are always, while they are united, 'labouring' against a tendency to separate. Their 'labour,' thus frustrated, issues in nothing more tangible than 'breath.' Throughout *Troilus*, the elements making for separation are too strong for those which desire union; and 'injurious time' is the process by which separation is born out of desired union.

Troilus and Cressida, then, is the product of a profound uncertainty about the value of experience. The manner in which this uncertainty grew almost imperceptibly out of something more conventional until it dominated the play is seen most clearly in the love-poetry of Troilus. This poetry is representative in that it does not reflect any clear-cut intention; it combines intensity of sensation with a peculiar weakness. Its distinctive quality consists above all in the penetration, incomplete and piecemeal, of conventional imagery with a new immediacy of sensation. It is a type of verse which takes us back once more to the Sonnets. The effect of some of the most individual of the sonnets depends upon a combination of conventional Petrarchan imagery with an intense sensual quality; the established image of the lily, to take an obvious example, with its associations of beauty and purity, is transformed by a magnificent juxtaposition of convention and intensity into the potent corruption of 'Lilies that *fester* smell far worse than weeds' (Sonnet XCIV). This type of verse, which obviously corresponds to an ambiguity of mood in the poet, is apparent in Troilus' first account of Cressida:

> I tell thee I am mad
> In Cressid's love; thou answer'st 'she is fair';
> Pour'st in the open ulcer of my heart
> Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice,
> Handlest in thy discourse, O that her hand,
> In whose comparison all whites are ink
> Writing their own reproach, to whose soft seizure
> The cygnet's down is harsh, and spirit of sense
> Hard as the palm of ploughman. (I. i.)

The underlying convention here is clearly Petrarchan. It makes itself felt in the suggestion that Troilus is 'mad' for love, in the

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strained use of 'pour'st' and 'handlest' to describe Pandarus' speech, in the comparison of Cressida's hand to the 'cygnet's down,' and in the introduction of 'ink' to bring out by contrast its superlative whiteness. But the conventional imagery is transformed, as it were, from within in a manner so intimately and closely bound up with the convention that it indicates perfectly this play's fundamental uncertainty of purpose. The transformation consists in giving deep sensuous value to the Petrarchan imagery, thereby conveying simultaneously an impression of intense feeling and an underlying lack of content. 'Handlest in thy discourse' is, as I have said, a far-fetched, almost an Euphuistic image; but it brings with it a notable keenness of touch which is developed in the contrast between harshness and the 'soft seizure' of the cygnet's down, between the hardness of the ploughman's hand and the almost unnatural immediacy of 'spirit of sense.' Yet the conventional note remains, and with it the feeling that Troilus' passion, for all its sensual intensity, has an inadequate basis, is vitiated by the weakness to which he confesses in the same scene—'I am weaker than a woman's tear.'

It is important to realize that this weakness, which is the central feature of *Troilus*, does not produce a tragedy of character, but of situation. The tragedy consists less in the personal suffering of Troilus than in the overriding influence exercised by Time upon human relationship and feelings. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, personal feeling has become strong enough to override mutability; in *Troilus* the supremacy of Time is never adequately questioned. The weakness of the characters in this play, which has given rise to so much irrelevant discussion about Cressida's motives and Shakespeare's attitude to her, is a reflection of the uncertainty of the mood which created it. Antony and Cleopatra, as lovers, are fully realized human beings, because Shakespeare felt, when he created them, that their love had a validity which transcended adverse circumstance and gave their emotions a full personal value; and conversely the complete realization as characters of Regan and Goneril in *King Lear* proves that Shakespeare felt himself able to distinguish, when he wrote that play, between the good and evil elements in his experience without falling into ambiguity and confusion. Antony and Cleopatra, Regan and Goneril have full reality as characters precisely because they proceed

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from a clear realization in Shakespeare of the value of human experience as opposed to the evil elements which are implicit in it. *Troilus and Cressida*, in which Shakespeare presented his intuition of time as destroying passion, making it vain and transitory, is compatible with no such individuality of presentation ; for time, as Shakespeare sees it in this play, destroys personal values and makes them invalid. Cressida's falseness does not spring from a deep-seated perversity of moral character, or even from a positive attraction for Diomed, but from the mere process of events, from a flaw inherent in the human situation. Her tragedy, such as it is, derives from awareness of her helplessness ; we feel it in her pathetic appeal when Troilus prepares to leave her after their night together:

> Prithee, tarry ;
> You men will never tarry, (IV. ii.)

and it is implied in the moment of self-knowledge in which she tells him:

> I have a kind of self resides with you,
> But an unkind self that itself will leave
> To be another's fool. (III. ii.)

There is something in the very expression of this uncertainty, half punning and conventional, which is typical of the play and makes it difficult for us to conceive of Cressida as a fully realized individual. At most, she lives for us only in the mood of the moment, with scarcely a sign of that responsibility and consistency in action which is involved in the very conception of character. Any attempt to subject her inconstancy to a moral judgment fails because the spirit in which Shakespeare created her made it impossible for her to be really responsible for her actions ; and without responsibilty there can be no moral evaluation. When she comments on her refusal, in the early part of the play, to reveal her feelings for Troilus:

> Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing ;
> Things done are won ; joy's soul lies in the doing, (I. ii.)

her aphoristic lines are not a revelation of wantonness, but simply an expression of the sense, which constitutes the only true tragedy of this play, of the impossibility, the meaninglessness of constancy

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in a world where time dominates human relationships, and where fulfilment and separation seem inevitable and connected aspects of a single situation.

This impossibility also dominates the poetry of Troilus himself and is there further developed. Troilus' passion is strong only in anticipation ; the very intensity of its sensations is conveyed in a refinement of physical feeling, in an attempt to embody in terms of the senses an insubstantial and incorporeal emotion:

> I am giddy: expectation whirls me round.
> The imagery relish is so sweet
> That it enchants my sense: what will it be,
> When that the watery palates taste indeed
> Love's thrice repured nectar? death, I fear me,
> Swounding destruction, or some joy too fine,
> Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness,
> For the capacity of my ruder powers:
> I fear it much, and I do fear besides
> That I shall lose distinction in my joys . . . (III. ii.)

The emotions of this passage are intense enough, but only in the palate and the senses ; they scarcely involve any full personality in the speaker. Troilus' emotions are concentrated on ' expectation,' on ' the *imaginary* relish,' and he feels that the ' watery palate ' will be too weak to sustain the actual consummation. The whole speech turns upon this contrast between the refined intensity of feeling which he seeks in ' Love's *thrice repured* nectar,' and the giddiness, the ' swounding destruction ' which is a confession of his weakness. The experience of love, it is suggested, is so fine, so ' subtle-potent,' that it surpasses the ' ruder powers ' of the body and remains an incorporeal aspiration which the senses strive vainly to attain. We can now see why Shakespeare makes such extensive use, in *Troilus*, of the imagery of taste, why Cressida, for example, says before she leaves Troy for the Greek camp:

> The grief is fine, full, perfect, that I *taste*. (IV. iv.)

Taste is a sense at once luxurious, delicate, and transient ; also it can be connected, in gross opposition to Troilus' bodiless idealism, with digestion and the functioning of the body. For the weakness of Troilus' passion implies that it is patient of corruption.

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Immediately above the speech just quoted there is a striking choice of verb in his appeal to Pandarus:

> O, be thou my Charon,
> And give me swift transportance to those fields
> Where I may *wallow* in the lily-beds
> Proposed for the deserver. (III. ii.)

The ideal aspirations of Troilus remain abstract, intangible; their very intensity derives from their subjection to time, from their awareness of their own transitory nature. But this impermanence makes them bodiless, so that the sensual instincts, unable to associate themselves fully with the insubstantial ideal of union in a mutual passion, express themselves at once weakly and basely, 'wallowing' in what would be, if it were more forceful, a corrupt satisfaction. Similarly, the refined imagery of taste given to the Trojans, and especially to Troilus, expresses a bodiless ideal which becomes, in the mouths of the scurrilous Thersites and the Greek cynics, a series of clogged, heavy references to digestion. Thersites has 'mastic jaws,' and Achilles calls him 'my cheese, my digestion,' whilst Agamemnon tells Patroclus that Achilles' virtues:

> like fair fruit in an unwholesome dish
> Are like to rot untasted. (II. iii.)

In fact, that sense which expresses the related intensity and lightness of Trojan passion becomes, in the Greeks, a symbol of inaction and distemper, out of which issue the boils, 'the botchy core,' of Thersites' disgust.

In this way we pass from the individual to the general issue, from the love of Troilus and Cressida to the war between the Greeks and Troy. The two parties, like the two lovers, are differentiated by divergences within a common type of imagery. The Trojans share the fragile intensity of Troilus. They are deeply concerned with the value of honour and with an idealistic view of love, whilst Hector shows the virtues of war which are so noticeably absent from the bulky Ajax and the graceless Achilles. Typical of them is the speech in which Troilus explains the case for the continuation of the war:

> But, worthy Hector,
> She is a theme of honour and renown;

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A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds,
Whose present courage may beat down our foes,
And fame in time to come canonize us. (II. ii.)

Yet the lightness and grace of this idealism obviously covers a certain artificiality. The verse itself is insubstantial and the expression vague and highflown. It reads, at this stage in Shakespeare's development, like a survival from earlier plays set against the contortions and involutions of so much of *Troilus*. This should remind us that Falstaff, in the First Part of *Henry IV*, had already given clear expression to Shakespeare's view of 'honour' as a suspicious abstraction based on no sufficient motive; and, indeed, Hector's reasoning in the same scene (II. ii.) shows clearly that the arguments advanced by Troilus are as flimsy as their expression is tenuous. For all this 'honour' is directed to the defence of Helen, whose worth had been destroyed by the manner in which she had been stolen from Menelaus. Even Paris can only argue that the dishonour of her rape should now be redeemed by the heroism of her defence. The tone of the Trojan references to Helen is very noticeable. Paris pleads that he

would have the *soil* of her *fair* rape
Wiped off in honourable keeping her,

and Troilus, with a slight but unmistakable twist of conventional imagery, declares that Paris

brought a Grecian queen, whose youth and *freshness*
Wrinkles Apollo's and *makes stale* the morning.

The juxtaposition of 'fair' and 'soil,' 'freshness' and 'stale,' touches the basic weakness of Trojan idealism, and points to the way in which that idealism is organically connected in its expression with the sluggish heaviness of the Greeks.

The underlying nature of this Trojan weakness is most explicitly stated in the speech in which Troilus sets forth his argument for the continuation of the war:

I take to-day a wife, and my election
Is led on in the conduct of my will;
My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,
Two traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous shores
Of will and judgment: how may I avoid,

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Although my will distaste what it elected,
The wife I chose? there can be no evasion
To blench from this, and to stand firm by honour. (II. ii.)

Troilus' terminology is indefinite and the expression of his argument, like so much of the discussion in this play, is far more complicated than its content. There seems at one point to be an opposition of 'will,' which we may define as sensual impulse, and 'judgment,' which should normally restrain and direct this impulse: the opposition, in short, of sensuality and moral control which became a little later the central theme of *Measure for Measure*. In that play the moral conflict is explicitly stated; in *Troilus and Cressida*, there is only an uncertainty, an uneasiness, which is reflected in the notable incoherence of the expression. The conclusion reached by 'judgment' is that affirmed by Hector—'value dwells not in particular will,' but rather in a weighing of alternatives in the light of the principles of reason—but the whole trend of Troilus' reply is to annihilate, or at least wilfully to confuse, the distinction between 'will' and 'judgment,' to show that 'judgment' is powerless and irrelevant once the sensual will has impelled man towards action. In other words, the basis of Troilus' honour is simply sensual impulse, and its weakness lies largely in its unwillingness to recognize this fact, and in the consequent abstraction and lack of content. Hector is significantly plain on the subject of Troilus' infatuation:

Is your blood
So madly hot that no discourse of reason,
Nor fear of bad success in a bad cause
Can qualify the same?

Troilus—and in this he is typical of all the Trojans—refuses to recognize the weakness of his conception of honour, but it is implied in the very situation upon which the play turns; for the reality of Helen, as Hector points out, does not correspond to Troilus' embroidered and Marlovian description of her:

Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost
The holding.

But this same lack of solid foundation is apparent in the undertones of Troilus' own poetry, where the unacknowledged sensual

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basis of his idealism refuses to be entirely suppressed. Underlying the light and 'poetical' quality of Troilus' verse, there is a distinct strain of coarseness and inertia. It appears in the references, so typical of this play, to the 'soiled silks,' and the 'remainder viands' which are thrown away 'because we now are full.' Most typical of all is the Trojan reaction to reason:

> Nay, if we talk of reason,
> Let's shut our gates, and sleep: manhood and honour
> Should have hare hearts, would they but *fat* their thoughts
> With this *crammed* reason: reason and respect
> Make *livers pale* and *lustihood deject.*

This insistence upon mental inertia and the obstruction of physical processes stands in significant contrast to the lightness and artificiality of Troilus' idealistic outbursts; but they are organically related to them. The Trojan devotion to honour, Shakespeare would seem to say, is devotion to an abstraction that has no sufficient basis in reason, to something that is, in fact, no more than an empty justification of impulse; but to abandon honour is to expose oneself to lethargy, to a rooted disinclination to act at all.[1]

The analysis of this important scene shows us how the contrast between Greeks and Trojans, which has often been noted by the critics, is modified by significant points of contact. This relationship, of course, is openly 'symbolized' in the combat between Hector and Ajax (IV. v.), when Hector refuses to carry on the duel with his 'cousin-german' and Ajax agrees to call a truce. But the contacts established by a common type of imagery are more important for an understanding of the play. In the Greek camp, we find fully explicit the staleness which Trojan honour had tried to ignore. Where the Trojans reject reason in favour of ill-considered action, the Greeks accept reason and are consequently reduced to inaction. Agamemnon's very first speech shows how inconclusive are the intellectual processes of the Greek leaders and how closely related they are to Troilus' views on 'crammed reason':

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[1]The relation of this to *Hamlet*, and in particular to the soliloquy 'How all occasions do inform against me' (IV. iv.) is worth careful attention.

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Princes,
What grief hath set the jaundice on your cheeks?
The ample proposition that hope makes
In all designs begun on earth below
Fails in the promised largeness: checks and disasters
Grow in the veins of actions highest reared,
As knots, by the conflux of meeting sap,
Infect the sound pine and divert his grain
Tortive and errant from his course of growth.
Nor, princes, is it matter new to us
That we come short of our suppose so far
That after seven years' siege yet Troy walls stand;
Sith every action that hath gone before,
Whereof we have record, trial did draw
Bias and thwart, not answering the aim
And that unbodied figure of the thought
That gave it surmised shape (I. iii.)

Agamemnon's thought proceeds, not from point to point according to a clearly defined logical sequence, but by a series of indeterminate digressions which convey his incapacity to come to a conclusion. The laboured illustrations and the theoretical observations destroy the coherence of his argument; there is no recognizable development of thought to justify the complexity. The repeated doublings of words—'checks and disasters,' 'tortive and errant,' 'bias and thwart'—all lay emphasis upon obstruction, upon the speaker's struggle against obscure impediments which hinder the Greeks from successful action; the use of unusual and unassimilated Latinized words, such as 'conflux' and 'tortive,' produces a similar sense of resistance and difficulty. More significantly still, these obstructions are associated with disturbances and interruptions in organic growth. The prospects of hope 'fail in the promised largeness,' do not grow to their proper and anticipated stature; 'checks and disasters' are indissolubly intertwined with natural growth, and the very rising of the sap in the 'sound pine,' which is so eminently a natural process, produces infection and distortion in the growth of the tree. Most important of all, because it corresponds most closely to the spirit of Troilus, thought is 'unbodied' and its processes, separated from the actual course of events, find themselves equally separated from the sensual

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immediacy which finds irresponsible expression in the comments of Thersites. The keen nervous quality which is so noticeably lacking from the theoretical observations of the Greek leaders breaks out significantly in Thersites' sweeping affirmations of anarchy and disorder ; in a similar manner, Troilus' idealism covers a sensual impulse which he refused to recognize.

It is only natural that this discrepancy in the Greeks between thought and action should be expressed in terms of physical disorder ; and here the link with the Trojans becomes more explicit. Thersites' boils and plague-spots are related to Agamemnon's laborious thoughts on authority and Ulysses' subtle contrivances just as Troilus' contempt for ' crammed reason ' and his insistence upon soilure and physical obstruction are connected with his abstract idealism. The vital part in Shakespeare's presentation of the Greeks is this association of continual ratiocination with a complete overthrow of ' degree ' in their ranks ; they are completely unable to turn council into united action. The position is briefly summed up by Thersites: ' Agamemnon is a fool to offer to command Achilles ; Achilles is a fool to be commanded of Agamemnon ; Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool ; and Patroclus is a fool positive.' (II. iii.). Whilst Agamemnon, Nestor, and Ulysses scheme and discuss, Ajax and Achilles ' fust ' (the word is typical) out of action ; the hand that executes is out of touch with the ' *still and mental* parts ' that contrive the conduct of the war. Perhaps the point is most clearly made by Ulysses in his account of Achilles' pride:

> imagined worth
> Holds in his blood such swoln and hot discourse
> That *'twixt his mental and his active parts*
> Kingdom'd Achilles in commotion rages
> And batters down himself. (II. iii.)

The conflict in Achilles between personal pride and duty to the Greek cause is stated here in terms of ' blood,' of sensual passion ; the implications of ' swoln and hot,' suggesting feverish disorder due to extreme intemperance, are unmistakable. The adjective ' kingdom'd,' like so many of the words which characterize the poetry of this play, is not fully explicit ; but it clearly refers the personal issue back to the general theme of ' degree.' The

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individual warrior, like the Greek polity at war, should be a unity founded upon 'degree'; and 'degree' in the individual is an ideal correspondence between thought and action, between impulse and control, between 'blood' and judgment.[1] On both sides, this balance is profoundly disturbed. The 'cunning' of the Greek leaders is manifestly out of touch with practical considerations and expends itself in an activity completely disproportionate to the desired end: 'it will not in circumvention deliver a fly from a spider, without drawing their massy irons and cutting the web' (II. iii.). On the Trojan side, the infidelity of Cressida undermines Troilus' faith in 'honour' as a basis of action and leaves him dimly aware of the incompatible and contrary elements which underlie what he had assumed to be the indivisible simplicity of human passion:

> Within my soul there doth conduce a fight
> Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate
> Divides more wider than the sky and earth;
> And yet the spacious breadth of this division
> Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
> As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.
> Instance, O instance! strong as Pluto's gates;
> Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven:
> Instance, O instance! strong as heaven itself;
> The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolved and loosed:
> And with another knot, five-finger-tied,
> The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,
> The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics
> Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed. (V. ii.)

All the characteristics of the love poetry of Troilus can be recognized here—its tenuous and unnaturally refined expression, its subtlety in dealing with vast distinctions within an apparent unity, its sensuous thinness balanced by the imagery of disgust and

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[1]Compare *Hamlet* (III. ii.):

> . . . blest are those
> Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled
> That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she pleases.

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repletion which connects it with the verse given to the Greeks and indicates the unifying factor in this play. For the ambiguous attitude towards experience which so deeply exercised Shakespeare in many of the sonnets is the determining factor in his presentation of both parties. Proceeding from his sense of the fatal disharmony introduced by time into the love of Troilus and Cressida, it expands to embrace the two parties in their fantastic and unreasonable conflict. The Trojans followed a false idealism, which deceived itself with talk of 'honour,' but was really based on 'blood' and ended in a pathetic and helpless realization of its own inadequacy; the Greeks elaborated endlessly a 'judgment' that was out of touch with the instinctive sources of action, so that Agamemnon's chaotic reasoning finds its proper comment in the distorted bitterness of Thersites' diseased sensibility.

The fundamental impulse of this play, and the link which binds together personal cleavage and political disorder is now clear. Ulysses' argument on 'degree' reduces itself finally to an intuition of self-consuming passion:

> Then everything includes itself in power,
> Power into will, will into *appetite*,
> And appetite, an universal wolf,
> So doubly seconded with will and power,
> Must make perforce an universal prey,
> And last *eat up himself* (I. iii.)

The speech is saved from the charge of abstraction by this relation of 'degree' to the disorder introduced by passion or 'appetite' into the human organism. This disorder, which is present on both sides in the conflict between Greeks and Trojans, is the theme of the play. The Trojans sought to ignore the deficiencies of passion in a bodiless 'idealism'; the Greeks, quite incapable of idealism, are weighed down by all that the Trojans tried to forget. Both parties are bound together by the occasion of their quarrel; as Thersites says—'all the argument is a cuckold and a whore.' Troilus, in one magnificent phrase, sums up the crux from which the subtle contradictions of this play draw their interest:

> 'This is the monstruousity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confined, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit.' (III. ii.)

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The ' infinity ' sought by the will is the idealistic love of Troilus, which neglects the wearing action of time and the related inability of passion to live up to purely abstract ideals of love and honour ; and the very ' boundlessness ' of the desire, when it encounters the limits imposed by time and the body to which it feels enslaved, turns to the clogged inertia of Achilles and the endless self-scrutiny of the Greek camp.

D. A. TRAVERSI.

REVALUATIONS (XI):

ARNOLD AS CRITIC

'AND I do not like your calling Matthew Arnold Mr. Kidglove Cocksure. I have more reason than you for disagreeing with him and thinking him very wrong, but nevertheless I am sure he is a rare genius and a great critic.'[1]

The note of animus that Hopkins here rebukes in Bridges is a familiar one where Arnold is concerned: it characterizes a large part of recorded comment on him. Raleigh's essay in *Some Authors* is (if we can grant this very representative *littérateur* so much distinction) a convenient *locus classicus* for it and for the kind of critical injustice it goes with. But one may be quite free from such animus or from any temptation to it—may welcome rather than resent that in Arnold by which the Raleighs are most antagonized—and yet find critical justice towards him oddly difficult to arrive at. He seems to present to the appraising reader a peculiarly elusive quantity. At least, that is my experience as an admirer, and I am encouraged in generalizing by the fact that the experience of the most important literary critic of our time appears to have been much the same.

In *The Sacred Wood*, speaking of Arnold with great respect, Mr. Eliot calls him ' rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic,' and I must confess that for years the formula seemed to me unquestionably just. Is Arnold's critical achievement after all

[1] *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, XCVII.*

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a very impressive one? His weaknesses and his irritating tricks one remembers very well. Is it, in fact, possible to protest with any conviction when we are told (in the later essay, *Arnold and Pater*)?—

> 'Arnold had little gift for consistency or for definition. Nor had he the power of connected reasoning at any length: his flights are either short flights or circular flights. Nothing in his prose works, therefore, will stand very close analysis, and we may very well feel that the positive content of many words is very small.'

And yet, if the truth is so, how is it that we open our Arnold so often, relatively? For it is just the oddity of Arnold's case that, while we are apt to feel undeniable force in such judgments as the above, we nevertheless think of him as one of the most lively and profitable of the accepted critics. Let us at any rate seize on the agreement that as a propagandist for criticism he is distinguished. On the view that has been quoted the first two essays in *Essays in Criticism: First Series* would be the texts to stress as exhibiting Arnold at his strongest, and they have, indeed, seemed to me such. And re-reading confirms the claim of *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* and *The Literary Influence of Academies* to be remembered as classical presentments of their themes. The plea for critical intelligence and critical standards and the statement of the idea of centrality (the antithesis of 'provinciality') are made in memorable formulations of classical rightness:

> 'whoever sets himself to see things as they are will find himself one of a very small circle; but it is only by this small circle resolutely doing its own work that adequate ideas will ever get current at all.'
>
> 'All the world has, or proposes to have, this conscience in moral matters . . . And a like deference to a standard higher than one's own habitual standard in intellectual matters, a like respectful recognition of a superior ideal, is caused, in the intellectual sphere, by sensitiveness of intelligence.'
>
> '. . . not being checked in England by any centre of intelligent and urbane spirit . . . '

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> 'M Planche's advantage is . . . that there is a force of cultivated opinion for him to appeal to.'
>
> '. . . a serious, settled, fierce, narrow, provincial misconception of the whole relative value of one's own things and the things of others.'

—Arnold's distinction as a propagandist for criticism cannot be questioned. At the same time, perhaps, it must be admitted that these essays do not involve any very taut or subtle development of an argument or any rigour of definition. They are pamphleteering —higher pamphleteering that has lost little of its force and relevance with the passage of time.

Yet it must surely be apparent that the propaganda could hardly have had its virtue if the pamphleteer had not had notable qualifications in criticism. The literary critic, in fact, makes a direct appearance, a very impressive one, in the judgment on the Romantics, which, in its time, remarks Mr. Eliot[1] (who elsewhere justly pronounces it incontrovertible) 'must have appeared startlingly independent.' It seems plain that the peculiar distinction, the strength, represented by the extracts given above, is inseparable from the critical qualifications manifested in that judgment: the sensitiveness and sure tact are essentially those of a fine literary critic.

But does any actual performance of Arnold's in set literary criticism bear out the suggestion at all convincingly? Again it is characteristic of his case that one should be able to entertain the doubt. How many of his admirers retain very strongly favourable impressions of the other series of *Essays in Criticism*?—for it is to this, and to the opening essay in particular, *The Study of Poetry*, that the challenge sends one back. For myself, I must confess to having been surprised, on a recent re-reading of that essay, at the injustice of my recollection of it. The references to Dryden and Pope tend (in my experience) to bulk unfairly, and, for that reason and others, there is a temptation to talk too easily of the essay as being chiefly memorable for having standardized Victorian taste and established authoritatively what, in the academic world, has hardly ceased to be the accepted perspective of poetic history.

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[1] *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 104.

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And it is, actually, as a review of the past from the given period angle that the essay claims its classical status. But it is classical—for it truly is—because it performs its undertaking so consummately. Its representative quality is of the highest kind, that which can be achieved only by the vigorously independent intelligence. If it is fair to say that Arnold, in his dismissal of Dryden and Pope by the criterion of soul ' and his curious exaltation of Gray, is the voice of the Romantic tradition in his time, we must note too that he is the same Arnold who passed the ' startlingly independent ' judgment on the Romantics. And with whatever reservations, protests and irritations we read *The Study of Poetry*, it is impossible in reading it (I find) not to recognize that we have to do with an extraordinarily distinguished mind in complete possession of its purpose and pursuing it with easy mastery—that, in fact, we are reading a great critic. Moreover, I find that in this inconsequence I am paralleled by Mr. Eliot. He writes in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (p. 118), in the mainly depreciatory chapter on Arnold:

> ' But you cannot read his essay on *The Study of Poetry* without being convinced by the felicity of his quotations: to be able to quote as Arnold could is the best evidence of taste. The essay is a classic in English criticism: so much is said in so little space, with such economy and with such authority.'

How is this curious inconsistency of impression—this discrepancy of report which, I am convinced, many readers of Arnold could parallel from their own experience of him—to be explained? Partly it is, I think, that, taking critical stock at a remove from the actual reading, one tends to apply inappropriate criteria of logical rigour and ' definition.' And it is partly (a not altogether separable consideration) that the essay ' dates ' in various ways ; allowances have certainly to be made with reference to the age to which it was addressed, certain things ' date ' in the most damaging sense, and it is easy to let these things infect one's general impression of the ' period ' quality of the essay.

The element that ' dates ' in the worst sense is that represented by the famous opening in which Arnold suggests that religion is going to be replaced by poetry. Few now would care to endorse the unqualified intention of that passage, and Arnold as a theological

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or philosophical thinker had better be abandoned explicitly at once. Yet the value of the essay does not depend on our accepting without reservation the particular terms in which Arnold stresses the importance of poetry in those introductory sentences, and he is not disposed of as a literary critic by pointing out that he was no theologian or philosopher ; nor is it proved that he was incapable of consistency and vigour of thought. Many who deplore Arnold's way with religion will agree that, as the other traditions relax and social forms disintegrate, it becomes correspondingly more important to preserve the literary tradition. When things are as already they were in Arnold's time, they make necessary, whatever else may be necessary too, the kind of work that Arnold undertook for ' Culture '—work that couldn't have been done by a theologian as such. No doubt Arnold might have been able to do it even better if he had had the qualifications that actually he hadn't ; he would at any rate have known his limits better, and wouldn't have produced those writings of his which have proved most ephemeral and which constitute the grounds on which Mr. Eliot charges him with responsibility for Pater.[1] But his actual qualifications were sufficiently remarkable and had their appropriate use. His best work is that of a literary critic, even when it is not literary criticism: it comes from an intelligence that, even if not trained to some kinds of rigour, had its own discipline ; an intelligence that is informed by a mature and delicate sense of the humane values and can manifest itself directly as a fine sensibility. That the specific qualifications of the literary critic have an important function some who most disapprove of Arnold's religious position readily grant.[2] Failure to recognize—or to recognize unequivocally—an admirable performance of the function in *The Study of Poetry* may be partly explained by that opening of the essay: Arnold, after all, issues the distracting challenge, however unnecessarily.

The seriousness with which he conceived the function and

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[1]See the essay ' Arnold and Pater ' in *Selected Essays*.

[2]See, *e.g.*, *Poetry and Crisis* by Martin Turnell (Sands: The Paladin Press, 2/6). With what reservations Mr. Turnell, writing as a Catholic, grants it a perusal of his extremely interesting book will show. But the book, which thus comes out opportunely for my purpose, bears on my argument, I think, in the way I suggest.

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the importance he ascribed to poetry are more legitimately expressed in the phrase, the best-known tag from the essay, ' criticism of life.' That it is not altogether satisfactory the animadversion it has been the object of must perhaps be taken to prove: at best we must admit that the intention it expresses hasn't, to a great many readers, made itself satisfactorily clear. Nevertheless Arnold leaves us with little excuse for supposing—as some of his most eminent critics have appeared to suppose—that he is demanding doctrine or moral commentary on life or explicit criticism. Nor should it be necessary to point out that all censure passed on him for having, in calling poetry ' criticism of life,' produced a bad definition is beside the mark.[1] For it should be obvious to anyone who reads the phrase in its context that Arnold intends, not to define poetry, but, while insisting (a main concern of the essay) that there are different degrees of importance in poetry, to remind us of the nature of the criteria by which comparative judgments are made.

Why Arnold should have thought the insistence and the reminder worth while and should have hit on the given phrase as appropriate for his purpose is not difficult to understand if we think of that Pater with whom, as noted above, he has been associated:

> ' " Art for Art's sake " is the offspring of Arnold's culture ; and we can hardly venture to say that it is even a perversion of Arnold's doctrine, considering how very vague and ambiguous that doctrine is.'

At any rate, we can certainly not say that ' Art for Art's sake ' is the offspring of Arnold's ' criticism of life.' In fact, Arnold's phrase is sufficiently explained—and, I think, vindicated—as expressing an intention directly counter to the tendency that finds its consummation in ' Art for Art's sake.' Aestheticism was not a sudden development: the nature of the trend from Keats through Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti was, even in Arnold's mid-career, not unapparent to the critic who passed the judgment on the great Romantics. The insistence that poetry must be judged

[1]See, *e.g.*, J. M. Robertson's curious performance in *Modern Humanist's Reconsidered* referred to by Mr. Eliot.

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as ' criticism of life ' is the same critic's reaction to the later Romantic tradition ; it puts the stress where it seemed to him that it most needed to be put.

In so far as Arnold ever attempts to explain the phrase it is in such terms as those in which, in the essay on Wordsworth, he explains why it is that Wordsworth must be held to be a greater poet than the ' perfect ' Gautier. But with no more explanation than is given in *The Study of Poetry* the intention seems to me plain enough for Arnold's purposes. To define the criteria he was concerned with, those by which we make the more serious kind of comparative judgment, was not necessary, and I cannot see that anything would have been gained by his attempting to define them. His business was to evoke them effectively (can we really hope for anything better?) and that, I think, he must be allowed to have done. We may, when, for example, he tells us why Chaucer is not among the very greatest poets, find him questionable and provoking, but the questions are profitable and the provocations stimulate us to get clear in our own minds. We understand well enough the nature of his approach ; the grounds of his criticism are sufficiently present. Pressed for an account of the intention behind the famous phrase, we have to say something like this: we make (Arnold insists) our major judgments about poetry by bringing to bear the completest and profoundest sense of relative value that, aided by the work judged, we can focus from our total experience of life (which includes literature), and our judgment has intimate bearings on the most serious choices we have to make thereafter in our living. We don't ordinarily ask of the critic that he shall tell us anything like this, or shall attempt to define the criteria by which he makes his major judgments of value. But Arnold appears to challenge the demand and so earns reprobation for not satisfying it. By considering the age to which he was addressing himself we are able to do him justice ; but if in this way he may be said to ' date,' it is not in any discreditable sense.

There is still to be met the pretty general suspicion to which Mr. Eliot gives voice when he says[1] that Arnold ' was apt to think of the greatness of poetry rather than of its genuineness.' It is a

[1] *The Use of Poetry, etc.*, p. 110.

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suspicion that is the harder to lay because, with a slight shift of accent, it turns into an unexceptionable observation:

> 'The best of Arnold's criticism is an illustration of his ethical views, and contributes to his discrimination of the values and relations of the components of the good life.'[1]

This very fairly accords due praise while suggesting limitations. We have, nevertheless, to insist that, but for Arnold's gifts as a literary critic, that criticism would not have had its excellence. And when the suspicion takes such form as the following,[2] some answer must clearly be attempted:

> 'Yet he was so conscious of what, for him, poetry was *for*, that he could not altogether see it for what it is. And I am not sure that he was highly sensitive to the musical qualities of verse. His own occasional bad lapses arouse the suspicion; and so far as I can recollect he never emphasizes this virtue of poetic style, this fundamental, in his criticism.'

Whatever degree of justice there may be in these suggestions, one point can be made at once: some pages of *The Study of Poetry* are explicitly devoted to considering 'genuineness'—the problem of how the critic makes those prior kinds of judgment, those initial recognitions of life and quality, which must precede, inform and control all profitable discussion of poetry and any evaluation of it as 'criticism of life.' Towards the close of the essay we read:

> '"To make a happy fireside clime
> To weans and wife,
> That's the true pathos and sublime
> Of human life."
>
> There is criticism of life for you, the admirers of Burns will say to us; there is the application of ideas to life! There is undoubtedly.'

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[1] *Criterion*, Vol. III, p. 162.
[2] *The Use of Poetry, etc.*, p. 118.

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And Arnold goes on to insist (in terms that would invite the charge of circularity if we were being offered a definition, as we are not) that the evaluation of poetry as ' criticism of life ' is inseparable from its evaluation as poetry ; that the moral judgment that concerns us as critics must be at the same time a delicately relevant response of sensibility ; that, in short, we cannot separate the consideration of ' greatness ' from the consideration of ' genuineness.' The test for ' genuineness ' Arnold indicates in this way:

> ' Those laws [of poetic truth and poetic beauty] fix as an essential condition, in the poet's treatment of such matters as are here in question, high seriousness ;—the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity. The accent of high seriousness, born of absolute sincerity, is what gives to such verse as
>
> " In la sua volontade è nostra pace . . . "
>
> to such criticism of life as Dante's, its power. Is this accent felt in the passages which I have been quoting from Burns? Surely not ; surely, if our sense is quick, we must perceive that we have not in those passages a voice from the very inmost soul of the genuine Burns ; he is not speaking to us from these depths, he is more or less preaching.'

This passage is old-fashioned in its idiom[1], and perhaps ' high

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[1]Comparison with a passage in a more modern idiom may prove interesting:

> ' But unless the ordering of the words sprang, not from knowledge of the technique of poetry added to a desire to write some, but from an actual supreme ordering of *experience*, a closer approach to his work will betray it. Characteristically its rhythm will give it away. For rhythm is no matter of tricks with syllables, but directly reflects personality. It is not separable from the words to which it belongs. Moving rhythm in poetry arises only from genuinely stirred impulses, and is a more subtle index than any other to the order of the interests.'
>
> I. A. Richards, *Science and Poetry*, p. 40.

Arnold's ' accent,' it will be shown, is intended to do much the same work as ' rhythm ' in this passage.

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seriousness' should be dismissed as a mere nuisance.[1] But 'absolute sincerity,' a quality belonging to the 'inmost soul' and manifested in an 'accent,' an 'accent that we feel if our sense is quick'—this phrasing, in the context, seems to me suggestive in a wholly creditable and profitable way. And actually it has a force behind it that doesn't appear in the quotation: it is strengthened decisively by what has come earlier in the essay.

The place in question is that in which Arnold brings out his critical tip, the 'touchstone.' Whatever that tip may be worth, its intention should be plain.[2] It is a tip for mobilizing our sensibility; for focussing our relevant experience in a sensitive point; for reminding us vividly of what the best is like.

> 'Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar.'

> 'The specimens I have quoted differ widely from one another, but they have in common this: the possession of the very highest poetical quality.'

It is only by bringing our experience to bear on it that we can judge the new thing, yet the expectations that we bring, more or less unconsciously, may get in the way; and some readers may feel that Arnold doesn't allow enough for the danger. But that he means to allow for it and envisages the problem with the delicate assurance of a fine critic is plain.

What, however, we have particularly to mark—the main point of turning back to this place in the essay—is what follows. Arnold, while protesting that 'It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples,' ventures, nevertheless, to give some critical account, 'not indeed how and why' the characters of a high quality of poetry arise, 'but where and in what they arise.'

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[1]It is an insistent nuisance in the whole essay. But the suspicion that Arnold is demanding with it a Victorian nobility of *tenue* should have been disposed of by his remarks on Burns.

[2]For a striking example of the kind of misinterpretation from which Arnold has suffered, the reader should turn up Raleigh's comments on the 'touchstone.'

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The account is characteristic in its method and, I think, notably justifies it.

> 'They are in the matter and substance of the poetry and they are in its manner and style. Both of these, the substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other, have a mark, an accent of high beauty, worth and power.'

And the succeeding couple of pages might seem to be mainly a matter of irritating repetition that implicitly admits an inability to get any further. Nevertheless, there is development, and the varied reiteration of associated terms, which is certainly what we have, has a critical purpose:

> 'We may add yet further, what is in itself evident, that to the style and manner of the best poetry their special character, their accent, is given by their diction, and, even yet more, by their movement. And though we distinguish between the two characters, the two accents, of superiority, yet they are nevertheless vitally connected one with the other. The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and manner marking its style and movement.'

It is plain that, in this insistent association of 'accent,' 'diction' and 'movement' in the equally insistent context, Arnold is offering his equivalent of Mr. Eliot's 'musical qualities of verse' and of the 'rhythm' of the footnote to page 327. His procedure is a way of intimating that he doesn't suppose himself to have said anything very precise. But he seems to me, all the same, to have done the appropriate directing of attention upon poetry—and that was the problem—not less effectively than the other two critics.[1]

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[1]As a way of bringing home the difficulty of achieving anything more precise in the treatment of this problem, the reader may profitably compare with one another Arnold's passages, the footnote above from *Science and Poetry*, Mr. Eliot's account of the 'auditory imagination' (*The Use of Poetry, etc.*, pp. 118-119), and Coleridge's remarks on 'the sense of musical delight' in chapter XV (head 1) of *Biographia Literaria*.

Arnold's comparative adequacy will be apparent.

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Inquiry, then, into the main criticisms that have been brought against *The Study of Poetry* yields reports decidedly in Arnold's favour. If he speaks in that essay with economy and authority, it is because his critical position is firmly based, because he knows what he is setting out to do, and because he is master of the appropriate method. The lack of the 'gift for consistency or for definition' turns out to be compensated, at his best, by certain positive virtues: tact and delicacy, a habit of keeping in sensitive touch with the concrete, and an accompanying gift for implicit definition—virtues that prove adequate to the sure and easy management of a sustained argument and are, as we see them in Arnold, essentially those of a literary critic.

However, it must be confessed that none of the other essays in that volume can be called a classic in English criticism. The *Milton* is a mere ceremonial address. (But it may be noted at this point that the reader who supposes Arnold to have been an orthodox idolator of Milton will be surprised if he turns up in *Mixed Essays* the essay called *A French Critic on Milton*). The *Gray* dates most of all the essays in the series—dates in the most damaging sense; though it may be said to have gained in that way a classical status as a document in the history of taste. Neither the *Keats* nor the *Shelley* makes any show of being a model critique of poetry; but nevertheless the rarely gifted literary critic is apparent in them. It is apparent in his relative placing of the two poets. 'Shelley,' he says, 'is not a classic, whose various readings are to be noted with earnest attention.' And the reasons he gives for his low valuation, though they are not backed with particular criticism, seem to me unanswerable. On Keats he is extraordinarily just, in appreciation both of the achievement and of the potentiality—extraordinarily just, if we think of the bias that 'criticism of life' is supposed to imply. The critic's quality comes out in some notable phrases:

> 'But indeed nothing is more remarkable in Keats than his clear-sightedness, his lucidity; and lucidity is in itself akin to character and to high and severe work.'
>
> 'Even in his pursuit of "the pleasures of song," however, there is that stamp of high work which is akin to character, which is character passing into intellectual production.'

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The *Wordsworth*, with all its limitations, is at any rate a distinguished personal estimate, and though by a Wordsworthian, and by the critic who spoke of poetry as the ' application of ideas to life,' exhibits its salutary firmness about the ' philosophy.'

But what has to be stressed is his relative valuation of the great Romantics: Wordsworth he put first, then Byron (and for the right reasons), then Keats, and last Shelley. It is, in its independence and its soundness, a more remarkable critical achievement than we easily recognize to-day. (The passage on the Romantics in the *Heine* essay should not be overlooked).

If any other particular work of his is to be mentioned, it must be the long essay *On Translating Homer*. It was, as Saintsbury points out,[1] an extraordinary original undertaking at the time, and it was carried out with such spirit and intelligence that it is still profitable reading.

The actual achievement in producible criticism may not seem a very impressive one. But we had better inquire where a more impressive is to be found. As soon as we start to apply any serious standard of what good criticism should be, we are led towards the conclusion that there is very little. If Arnold is not one of the great critics, who are they? Which do we approach with a greater expectation of profit? Mr. Eliot himself—yes ; and not only because his preoccupations are of our time ; his best critical writing has a higher critical intensity than any of Arnold's. Coleridge's pre-eminence we all recognize. Johnson?—that Johnson is a living writer no one will dispute, and his greatness is certainly apparent in his criticism. Yet that he imposes himself there as a more considerable power than Arnold isn't plain to me, and strictly as a critic—a critic offering critical value—he seems to me to matter a good deal less to us. As for Dryden, important as he is historically, I have always thought the intrinsic interest of his criticism much overrated: he showed strength and distinction in independent judgment, but I cannot believe that his discussion of any topic has much to offer us. We read him (if we do) because

[1] ' Almost for the first time, too, we have ancient literature treated more or less like modern—neither from the merely philological point of view, nor with reference to the stock platitudes and traditions about it.' *Matthew Arnold*, G. Saintsbury, p. 68.

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of his place in literary history, whereas we read Arnold's critical writing because for anyone who is interested in literature it is compellingly alive. I can think of no other English critic who asks to be considered here, so I will say finally that, whatever his limitations, Arnold seems to me decidedly more of a critic than the Sainte-Beuve to whom he so deferred.

F. R. LEAVIS.

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

It is opportune to call attention to the work of *For Intellectual Liberty*, which provides an opening for 'intellectuals' and professional workers to unite in pursuit of a few fundamental aims that readers of this journal are likely to find acceptable, by means that are not open, I think, to the usual objections. The latest leaflet of the Association contains an admirable, and admirably concise, statement of the relations of public policy and intellectual liberty and explores the possibilities of action.

The minimum subscription to F.I.L. is 5s. a year (3s. 6d. for teachers in elementary and secondary schools), but those who can are asked to give more. Particulars of the Association may be had from the Hon. Secretary, 23 Haymarket, London, S.W.1.

L.C.K.

IVOR GURNEY AND THE ENGLISH ART-SONG

The series of commemorative recitals of the songs of Ivor Gurney, given by the B.B.C. last July, was on the whole disappointing ; but if one had perhaps been led to expect too much by the understandable zeal of his friends and colleagues—for

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Gurney was, by all accounts, an endearing personality about whose tragic destiny one's feelings must inevitably be tender—there was nonetheless enough evidence in these recitals to establish Gurney as a serious composer, if a very little one, with a melodic idiom that constitutes a unique contribution to English song. He was influenced by no fashionable or unfashionable movement, he was not even in on the renaissance of English folk-music. Yet his melodic lines, of considerable length and flexibility, and habitually asymmetrical, indicate an assured measure of independence. It is not a demonstrative idiom ; it expresses what is essentially a single mode of feeling, quiet, meditative and retrospective. The tone is gentle, almost conversational—his position in English music is somewhat similar to that of Edward Thomas in English poetry, though I doubt if he has any quality corresponding to Thomas's irony and delicacy of fibre. Gurney's is a timid genius, but in his best work he has done something that can never be equalled because it can never be imitated, being created music, *sui generis*.

The question that seems to me to be worth asking is, Would Gurney have been a better or a worse composer if he had not been a pupil of Stanford? He was, of course, a nostalgic, a retrospective artist, yet he was, in his very nostalgia, an artist of the twentieth century, whereas the convention he adopted belonged in its essence to an earlier age. I felt occasionally in listening to these songs that there was some slight tension between Gurney's ways of melodic expression and the harmonic idiom he was, by force of circumstance, compelled to adopt. Considering the complex and asymmetrical nature of his most characteristic melodies I think it is possible that he might have written his piano parts in a rather more linear manner if he had been as familiar with the English musical heritage as was, for instance, Philip Heseltine ; and it is just possible that in this case he might have been less rigorously committed to a single—in the long run rather monotonous—manner. On the other hand he might never, but for Stanford's influence, have learned to express himself at all.

But it was no such technical conundrum that Gurney himself ever intended to solve ; the problem that concerned him was that of reconciling the claims of the human singing voice with those of the human speaking voice, and this is a problem that every song-writer is obliged to face. Gurney was well equipped to tackle

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this matter because he was a poet himself—a reasonably respectable Georgian with some knowledge of his craft, though only a rather touching matey generosity of spirit can account for the opinion, prevalent among musicians, that he was a poet of any significance. When only a comparatively simple lyrical poem is in question it is not in itself enormously difficult to attain to a measure of fidelity to the sense of the words, the difficulty lies in making this faithful mirror musically interesting and self-subsistent. And the same problem is accentuated when poems embodying more profound and complex experiences are to be given a musical accompaniment. Music can do nothing to ' enhance ' the ' meaning ' of a poem like Thomas's *Lights Out* or Yeats's *The Folly of being Comforted* ; it may add something of its own, but from the poem itself it can only take away. In the rhythms of these two poems, for instance, there is implicit an extremely subtle balance between the conversational rhythms of the speaking voice and the rhythms of lyrical (that is, quasi musical) declamation ; to attempt to translate these rhythms into a vocal line means that some of the subtlety of balance must be sacrificed, that one possible rhythmic interpretation must be clumsily insisted on at the expense of others. It is significant that in setting these, and similar poems, Gurney's music tends increasingly to the condition of heightened declamation —encourages the poetical at the expense of the musical virtues. As songs they are, though very interesting, literally a partial success.

That very remarkable Moravian composer Leos Janácek held, it is apposite to recall, that all the mysteries of musical language can be explained by reference to the rhythms and inflexions of the human voice when it speaks in anger or love or fear or any other emotion to which human beings are susceptible, and he evolved his own unique melodic speech only after a long and most scrupulous research into the varying tonal traits of the language spoken by his countrymen. In this individual musical language he composed some of the most interesting music of our time. Yet I think it is significant that he should always have been regarded as a by-product of musical history and that, despite his carefully formulated attitude, he should have no imitators or disciples. He deliberately exploited, I believe, only a part of the melodic resources of which music is capable. I do not want to suggest

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that the natural rhythms of the human singing voice are any less subtle than those of the human speaking voice, but they are, I am sure, of a different order—different, it may be, in being less topical and local. Lyrical utterance and the spoken word, if they aren't actually antipathetic, will never be easy bedfellows, and the troubadours (for instance), who created some of the finest vocal music, qua lyricism, the world has ever known, recognized this when they unashamedly treated the words as material for decorative arabesque ; nor did the notorious ' realism ' of the Elizabethans in their illustration of verbal ' effects ' amount, in the long run, to much more than a traditionally sanctioned musical convention.

Some sort of compromise seems, then, to be unavoidable, and if one is tempted to think that compromise is inevitably limiting one has in refutation only to examine—I am thinking of examples in which the ' spoken ' word has considerable intrinsic poetic value and metrical subtlety—Peter Warlock's magnificent settings of Yeats in *The Curlew*. To compare these songs with Gurney's *The Folly of being Comforted* brings home the difference between the thing accomplished and the admirable intention. But the intention is not to be sniffed at, and Gurney's is a beautiful song that repays the closest study.

It is a corollary of all I have been saying that the poem which will allow of the most profound, as well as the most successful, musical treatment will not *usually* be very profound in itself—or anyway it will not be very difficult or corrugated rhythmically. The emotional associations of the tritest poetic convention were sufficient to inspire the Elizabethan lutenist or madrigalist to the bravest flight of melodic fancy ; and the finest of all the Gurney songs broadcast in the series of recitals seemed to me to be a setting of a completely commonplace, not to say factitious, poem by John Freeman called *Last Hours*. Elsewhere there is something less than mastery ; Gurney's personality, for all his melodic originality and, sometimes, the boldness of his harmony, does not always assert itself strongly enough to dispel every suspicion of the stock in trade of the Edwardian ballad, while the more pretentious de la Mare songs, such as *The Scribe*, tend to be flat and tedious because so uncertain in intention. But the unpretentious settings of Fletcher—good but minor poetry—are almost invariably

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beautiful, and *Sleep*, though inferior to, is worthy to be put beside, the setting of this poem by Peter Warlock.

Twenty representative songs by Gurney have recently been published in two elegantly produced volumes (with frontispiece and preface) by the Oxford University Press, at the reasonable price of 5/- a volume.

W.H.M.

DEFENDING LETTERS

DEFENSE DES LETTRES, par G. Duhamel (Mercure de France, 1937).

IN DEFENCE OF LETTERS, tr. by E. F. Bozman (Dent, 1938, 8/6).

Most of M. Duhamel's theses are acceptable. As the title indicates he is concerned about the present state of literature and civilization. ' La crise qui secoue le monde n'est pas une crise économique ou politique ou sociale. C'est une crise de civilisation . . . je ne me lasse pas de dire que, dans les conditions actuelles du monde humain, la destinée de notre civilisation est liée à la destinée du livre. Et j' ajoute aussitôt que la cause du livre dépend, pour une très grande part, de la ferme volonté du corps universitaire.' His manner is solemn ; he writes as a sympathetic elder to his younger contemporaries. ' J'ai composé le présent ouvrage non seulement pour attirer l'attention de mes contemporains sur certaines questions poignantes, mais pour laisser un témoignage.' The simplicity and dignity of the book make it an admirable choice for a school prize.

But nowadays in a more sophisticated world everyone is willing to admit the existence of a *Kulturkrise*, not only those who try to defend letters, but also those who are content to drift with the times and those whose deliberate intention is to exploit the ' crisis.' Consequently an effective defence must make it possible to distinguish friend from foe. I do not know how the book was received in France ; but one English reaction deserves to be quoted because it is so representative of the stock attitude to any general

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condemnation of the state of letters. And those whose aim is to do more than salve their conscience by dignified protests might well consider the implications of the following situation.

In the *Times Literary Supplement* for August 6th, 1938, M. Duhamel's book was taken as one of the texts in an article on 'Present Discontents.' The direct comment of an editorial in the same issue ran: 'These are the anxieties which trouble our correspondent. It may be that some of his readers will profess a robuster faith in the powers of the spirit to maintain itself inviolate against all that money-getting can do, whether in the book market, the cinema, or the wireless.' And in this editorial the writer, unabashed, asserts: 'There has always been as much trash as the public could absorb; and the vastly increased appetite of a vastly increased public that can read is fed every day by masterpieces in scores, every one of them too masterly to be announced in anything narrower than a couple of columns and anything smaller than very large capitals. That is sad, and silly; but the real danger is that all this trumpeting and shouting, all this parade of wind, earthquake and fire, should drown the still small voice of true literature.' One cannot, alas, suppose that this is a piece of stringent self-criticism. For in this same issue detective novels receive their usual honoured place. The novel of the week which is given two columns of prominence was *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier. A few excerpts from the review will be sufficient to clinch the point. 'If one chooses to read the book in a critical fashion—but only a tiresome reviewer is likely to do that—it becomes an obligation to take off one's hat to Miss du Maurier for the skill and assurance with which she sustains a highly improbable fiction . . . The conventions of a story of this kind are not the conventions of the so-called realistic novel, and it would be absurd to reproach Miss du Maurier for her fine, careless rapture. In its kind *Rebecca* is extraordinarily bold and confident, eloquent and accomplished to a degree that merits genuine respect. Hundreds of novelists to-day try to write on a similar theme ("low brow story with a middlebrow finish"); the few who produce novels as readable as this are household names. It is fair, no doubt, to call this type of fiction "dope." But it is no good pretending that everybody would read Tolstoy or Proust if there were no dope literature.' In the light of this the close of the

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editorial appears for what it is, a perfect parody of the editorial manner. 'The whole world is in need of spiritual truth and freedom, and discouragement that should lead to indifference might well be fatal to civilization.'

That, however dignified, a simple general approach is ineffective is shown more clearly in the second part of the book which treats of the duties and responsibilities of authors. Here again much of what he says is sound, though nothing is new. And though his French public will feel sure here and there of the particular case of abuse M. Duhamel has in mind, the average English reader will not derive much profit from a catalogue of specimen cases without, as it were, any case-histories. The one concrete example—the portrait of Brandes—stands out vividly in contrast with the rest. But it is not mere want of particularity which diminishes the value of the book. There is in marked contrast to the expressed intention a distressing instability of tone. M. Duhamel does not seem to have made clear to himself what audience he imagined he was addressing. Some remarks seem to be aimed at the dawning intelligence, others to contemporary authors ; whole sections would suit a French colonial public, others would do better for 'ces petites gens d'entre lesquels je suis sorti.' Consequently his observations vary enormously in value and in scope. But whereas a short chapter is adequate to deal with some technical point such as the difficulties of the export book trade to South America, it is alarming to find him raising problems of the following order: 'La littérature française est-elle, comme on l'a dit parfois, une littérature de moralistes? Voilà sans doute un problème qui demande examen': and treating it at such a level that it can be polished off in half a dozen pages.

Défense des lettres at least serves as a reminder that a general presentation of the position of letters in this country is urgently needed. There is much scattered material already available. But all the aspects of the problem must be brought together into one volume. And above all it must be particular and topical. If the law of libel should prove an insuperable obstacle, there is still another solution. For one learns more say, of the position of the artist from one short story of Henry James on this theme than one can glean from the whole three hundred pages of this book.

H. A. MASON.

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THE PRESS

REPORT ON THE BRITISH PRESS (PEP, 16 Queen Anne's Gate, S.W.1, 10/6).

That the part played by the Press in the modern world is an important and increasingly dominant one is generally admitted. For good or ill the course of our civilization is largely determined by the way the Press is directed. It is in fact one of the forces which must be controlled if what is left of our cultural tradition is not to be allowed to disintegrate completely. Consequently any light that can be thrown on the present state of the Press and its observable tendencies is to be welcomed. Unfortunately most of the published criticism comes from biassed sources or is based on insufficient information. The present report, therefore, on the face of it deserves attention. For, to quote from one of their own pamphlets, ' PEP is an independent, voluntary, non-party group and is not run for profit. It consists of more than a hundred working members, and through its broadsheet PLANNING, is in touch with many more hundreds of people actively interested in promoting national reconstruction through an objective fact-finding approach to current social and economic problems.' The report is the result of three years' work by the Press Group of PEP. ' The experience represented on the group has included newspaper and periodical editing, news editing, feature editing, leader writing, national and provincial newspaper reporting, staff and free-lance writing for a wide variety of publications, circulation management, advertising, public relations work in government, public concern and company interests, issue of publications for review and of Press releases, broadcasting, and literary and radio criticism.' The main object of the report is ' to present a clear and balanced account of the present state of development of the Press and its problems and achievements as an industry and as a social organ.'

Both the urgency of the question and the illumination (however partial) it has received demand that the present report be judged by the severest possible standards. And since the Press is so closely linked with the cultural prospects of society, it is by its treatment of the Press as a cultural force that the report must be finally judged. And here, as I hope to show, it is most

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faulty. The book is strongest, not so much in fact-finding, as in fact-collecting. A useful assemblage from current reference books makes sufficiently plain the situation of the Press considered as an industry. The original researches of the group deal with topics of doubtful or slight interest, though they represent great labour and industrious collecting of ' facts.' Naturally the straight-forward accounts of the processes involved in running a newspaper, from wood-pulp to final delivery, as coming from those who are actually engaged in this work, carry conviction. But where the mere collecting of data is useless, where in fact another discipline and technique are required—and it is in this field that most of the more important problems lie—the writers show themselves to be ill-equipped and out of their depth.

The most admirable feature of the report lies in the weight of evidence it brings to support conclusions that are generally drawn but only tentatively held for the want of the very information that is assembled here. On the basis of this report one can assert and demonstrate that the history of the newspaper industry has followed in broad outline the normal development of industry in Great Britain. There is an excellent and detailed account of the financial relation between the Press and its advertising interests. One of the consequences that is plainly drawn, is the resulting impossibility of introducing a new national paper with a large circulation without a capital running into millions. Figures are quoted to show that the national Press is expanding while the circulation of the provincial Press is at a standstill. They point out that it is virtually impossible to conduct an influential paper without carrying advertising. Thus: ' each paper has a business side whose sole interest is profit. Advertising managers are not primarily concerned with the accuracy, veracity or social desirability of an advertisement.' Nor do they hesitate to conclude that the commercial function of the Press conflicts with its social function as an agency of enlightenment.

The inadequacy of the report in so far as it treats of the Press as a social influence is not easily shown in a review. For it is a pervasive inadequacy which takes the form at one point of omissions, and at another of evasions: the problems are not seen or are confused. But one initial assumption can clearly be shown to point to a deficiency. The writers of the report are aware of

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a difference between the two main parts of their report. ' As an industry the Press can to some extent be studied by objective methods, but many of its problems and the major part of its output defy measurement and confront any investigator with great dangers of subjective bias.' Again, ' no two people are likely to agree in detail about the social influences of the Press. There is no way of measuring these influences objectively . . . the material for such an assessment as follows is inevitably subjective.' Now without wishing to be philosophical about these terms ' objective ' and ' subjective ' or to push the argument too far (though the attitude here criticized is to be found generally among amateur sociologists) it can at least be maintained that the strict use of these terms presupposes an approach which renders the whole effort of evaluation vain. For if any opinion about the quality of the Press is ' subjective,' the mere fact of adding and comparing a hundred or so opinions does not greatly redeem their damning personal nature. No effort of national reconstruction can proceed on such a basis. If there are no recognized standards to which judgments can be related, no coherent plan can be formed. Of course, the writers do have standards: but they are not sufficiently high or sufficiently related to serve them in the crucial cases.

A useful comparison to clarify the point may be made between this report and the chapter on the Press in *England* by Wilhelm Dibelius. A careful reading of both reveals the difference between the clear judgment of a cultivated mind and the hesitancy of the imperfectly educated. Two examples must suffice. In both works there are discussions of the effect of the Press on public taste. Dibelius wrote: ' This (agitation) is one method to influence the masses: the other is continuous reiteration of all the slogans of the market-place to darken counsel and stifle independent thought in the bud. The Press always boasts that it educates the masses intellectually: it certainly does so in many small questions of the day: in all the big issues, however, it does exactly the opposite: it repeats—with the most skilful variation in detail—the same argument so often that it becomes an axiom and makes the reader's mind absolutely inaccessible to any arguments from the opposite camp.' The attitude of the report is fairly represented by this: ' No newspaper can do more than keep one step in front of its public, but no newspaper can afford to be one step behind it. So

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far from the public taste having fallen from a once high level, there is good reason to suppose that it was even lower in the past, although the rise of mass-circulation newspapers has made its shortcomings much more generally conspicuous.'

The second example concerns the improper influences which are brought to bear on the Press. Here the report, no doubt in its desire to avoid subjectivism, unfortunately gives the impression that it is trying to evade the issue and while making minor admissions on the way finally whittles down these distorting influences to the relatively minor ' unconscious journalistic bias.' The report concludes on this subject with the following: ' Indeed, after reviewing all these potentially distorting influences, it appears creditable that the Press maintains so high a degree of impartiality as it does.' Speaking, it is true, of Northcliffe, Dibelius wrote: ' in a great newspaper of this type everything is politics, not only the leading articles. There is political significance in the amount of space a sub-editor will give to a news-item: whether it is merely inserted once or hammered into the reader's mind with a constant stream of fresh detail: the kind of type it has been set in: whether it is being followed up in a succession of leaders and so used to create opinion, or merely lost amid the mass of other news-items. When political agitation, on the grand scale, is being carried on, this propaganda purpose must inspire not leaders only but every line that appears in the paper.'

These examples are quoted not merely to show a difference of temper and outlook, but to draw attention to the paralysis of the ' subjective-objective ' method. For the report does not attempt seriously to bring evidence to support its views and refute those of critics such as Dibelius. Yet these questions are capable of rational discussion. If public taste has really improved since the war, the signs of improvement can be indicated. The laws of libel may make it difficult to cite particular cases of undue influence. At least to assert that they are the exception without showing the method of calculation is hardly scientific. The whole question of the relation of the Press to public taste needs more extensive treatment than it is given here. The formula, ' give the public what it wants,' in particular, needs to be more rigorously analysed. Such an analysis would have involved considerable improvements throughout the book.

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The standards appealed to in the reports are not despicable: it is just that they are not high enough. They are probably those of most self-respecting journalists. But it is not enough to take *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* as models of what a paper should be. Further, there is something equivocal about the appraisal of the 'new popular journalistic technique.' 'American popular papers,' we learn, 'are even more brightly and crisply written than the British popular Press.' 'Long and prosy articles have been replaced throughout the popular Press by short paragraphs with stimulating headlines.' The increase in circulation of the *Telegraph* 'is one of the wonders of post-war Fleet Street.' 'The class papers have profited by the experience of the popular Press to brighten their pages.' Typical of the general attitude is the complaint that the one 'cultural subject' mishandled by reporters is Science. Whereas, 'in some of the popular newspapers the quality of book criticism is remarkably high. In the "class" newspaper, the critics, or at any rate those who cover art, music, literature and drama, are men and women in the front rank of their respective subjects.'

In concluding the writers point out that their report, 'is intended as a first step towards building up the necessary awareness of the problem, the necessary body of information, and the necessary sense of responsibility.' Moreover they consider, 'that many necessary improvements in the British Press can only be secured by providing for the continuous scientific study of the Press and full discussion of its problems,' and suggest that a Press Institute be set up in England. This support would rather suggest, first, that something more than a narrow 'scientific' attitude is required: that the essential facts do not exist for observation until a certain degree of cultural awareness is reached: and that the interpretation of these facts involves a deeper understanding than is shown here of the relation of the Press to civilized standards and of its social responsibilities and shortcomings.

H. A. MASON.

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EDUCATION, WRITING AND ACTION

WRITING AND ACTION : a documentary anthology. Compiled and edited by Mary Palmer (George Allen and Unwin, 8/6).

This anthology consists of extracts from the works of men who ' wrote to persuade to action '—action for intellectual, social and political liberty, and against intolerance, ignorance and oppression. The greater number of the extracts are as noteworthy for their clear and vigorous prose as for their content. The value that the editor attaches to good writing and, consequently, good reading, is stressed in a very clear and sensible note ' On Reading and Writing.'

As history, too, the book is of great interest. It is possible to trace from Sir Thomas More (the first writer quoted) to the present day the same evils produced by the same ring of vested interests—' a certain conspiracy of rich men,' More calls them. The true nature of the Puritan rebellion is well brought out—any illusions about its ' revolutionary ' nature can be disposed of from first-hand evidence in the extracts from Lilburne and Winstanley (some of the best prose in the book), the representatives of the truly revolutionary sections of the Commonwealth party.

The editor thinks ' that teachers may find in the book a useful link between English, History and Science in VIth forms ' (it contains a good section on ' Science and Toleration '). Certainly, it could be used with advantage in English lessons with any of these branches, of the Sixth, or in History lessons, with a form not specializing in History, as an excellent introduction or groundwork. But something must be done about the price: very few schools or pupils can afford eight-and-sixpence for a text book. It is to be hoped that the publishers will feel encouraged to issue a cheap reprint as soon as possible.

F.C.

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POETRY AND ANARCHISM, by Herbert Read (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

Miss Ethel Mannin, according to the publishers, says that it is a very long time since she has been so excited about a book ; she thinks that its lucidity is admirable, its sanity superb, and that its wisdom blows like a great clean breath of fresh air through all the hot air and general deoxygenation of so-called ' left ' thought to-day. With the best will in the world one can hardly say that Mr. Read didn't deserve this. Any good cause is liable to be discredited by its supporters but this book does nothing to mitigate the danger. And yet, painful as it is to think of the people who will be waving their red and black banners, there is a great deal of good in this book, and in its timeliness it may fulfil an important function.

It comes at a moment when people are fed-up with international affairs that consist of the manœuvring and power-balancing of states, whether quasi-democratic or dictatorial. And it reminds them enthusiastically and with much good feeling that an alternative political principle is ready to hand. The strength and weakness of anarchism both lie in its being a genuinely different political principle and not possessed of either the futility or the immediate workability of a mere variation in state policy, such as dictatorial communism.

Mr. Read believes that anarcho-syndicalism *is* readily workable and could keep production running at its present speed. Others may doubt whether it could maintain the existing standard of material prosperity—though what it did give us would be more secure and better shared out. About anarchism in Spain too Mr. Read is unpractically hopeful. In the light of George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* he seems fatally to underestimate the repressive strength there of Russian (state) communism. In fact it is probably just at the times when state politics have produced crisis without collapse, and the states are braced up for survival, that anarchism can least hope to function successfully ; in an air-raid you support the best defensive organism, and that at present is generally a central government.

In the main *Poetry and Anarchism* leaves on one side both working policy and closely-reasoned theory, concentrating with a rather too consciously ' poetic ' directness upon central principle.

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The lack of discipline and ordered thinking that pressure of conviction might excuse are here made worse by Mr. Read's effusive intellectuality. Psycho-analysis, surrealism, J. D. Unwin, and Kierkegaard are all brought in with that thrilled responsiveness to ideas that must have given animal magnetism and phrenology their day of fashion.

For all that, the book should be read, read rapidly for its main idea and excellence of intention and sentiment, and not taken too seriously as a fully reasoned statement of its case. The best passages are the denunciations of bureaucracy, of huge-scale centralized politics, of professional diplomacy, of politics as a career, of general governmental delegates instead of *ad hoc* delegates ; these denunciations spring direct from the central doctrine and point its significance. Most of them are to be found in the chapter called ' The Necessity of Anarchism.' They suggest implicitly how the principles of this mode of co-operative social life can be expressed in the detail of individual lives: in eschewing personal dominance ; in combating centralization, with its gerontocracy and self-perpetuating committees ; and in working to disintegrate precedent-ridden institutions and to dissolve the fixed social categories, of whatever kind, by which personal relationships are depersonalized.

D.W.H.

MR. CHASE ON WORDS

THE TYRANNY OF WORDS, by Stuart Chase (Methuen, 10/6).

The continuance of certain disputes, thinks Mr. Stuart Chase, shows that civilization is in danger. Some of them can be brought nearer their conclusion by a more scrupulous use of words, which is strongly to be recommended. Others cannot properly speaking be concluded, for properly speaking they have never begun. They are mere word-spinning and, as they are about nothing at all, can only be abandoned.

There are subjects, he says, about which it is strictly impossible to know anything, and therefore impossible to think or to speak. They do not include mathematics, perhaps not physics, but certainly ethics, politics and metaphysics. This scepticism although wide is not in itself surprising, for something very like it is familiar

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in a number of quarters. What is surprising is that it should be Mr. Chase's, that he should hold it firmly, and that he should have no fear of its implications. They include a pessimism at least not favourable and possibly fatal to civilization ; which is just what Mr. Chase says he wishes to preserve.

If any dangers threaten they do so, not from the region of mathematics, but precisely from that of ethics and politics. It seems unlikely that their sole cause should be word-spinning, which is a trivial pastime ; but if not they have other causes which, according to the sceptics, are hidden from us and are beyond our control. If and when the dangers come, we can only submit ; if they are real, they are also ineluctable like the scourges once known as divine—plagues in the Middle Ages, and earthquakes, cyclones and floods to-day.

Not that Mr. Chase himself appears unaware of the helplessness to which he is reduced, and to which he would reduce other people. There are no general principles, he says, in the light of which to decide even so important a question as that between peace and war. ' Non-resistance '—I am quoting from his book—' is meaningless as a timeless principle.' It is meaningless, not false. While itself not true, that is, it can neither be qualified nor negatived to yield truth ; it cannot serve even as a starting-point for discussion: it can only be ignored, together with the books which have hitherto been held to command, to defend or to controvert it. For it can be neither controverted, defended nor commanded, and the books are as void of significance as the scribble of an uneducated child. If and when war comes it must find us unprepared: we shall neither take up arms nor refuse to take them up because we have thought about doing the one thing or the other ; we shall hardly perhaps know which of them we are doing, for we shall be taking ourselves by surprise.

I do not think I am misrepresenting Mr. Chase. His arguments against the ' timeless principle ' for example are all of the following kind: ' To proclaim in advance what one will or will not do in some future situation is a branch of astrology. You do not know what you will do until you are in it. In the event of an unprovoked attack by air on your city, a military invasion of the country where you live, a sudden revolutionary uprising on the streets as you go home to lunch, your boy's being choked to

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death by poison gas—how can you tell what you will do *then*?' And over the page: 'My feeling is against war; what my body will do when the time comes, I cannot say.' At first sight the arguments are inept, being directed against the possibility, not of statements about what ought to be done (such as the principle of non-resistance), but of statements about what will be done. The two are different. But Mr. Chase puts forward the arguments in good faith, and so glaring an ineptitude would not escape him. It must be therefore that he does not recognize the difference, and that in his eyes statements of the first kind are in import absolutely identical with the second. Given this identity, and given that we do not know what we shall do, obviously what we ought to do is unknown. Our knowledge is confined to what we are doing now; and in view of the rapidity with which the present crumbles before the future, it cannot be large.

Those who reject the guidance of general principles to follow particular promptings of their mind or soul have often been the butt of satire. They make it more difficult to carry on civilization, which demands a limited certainty of co-operation between its members. The inner light, though supposed to reveal the same things to all people, in practice does not always do so, and by exclusive reliance on it the margin of certainty is reduced. Mr. Chase abolishes the margin altogether, for he rejects both general principles and the inner light in favour of what might be called an inner heat—a prompting of the muscles and of the blood. He will 'wait to see what his body does when the time comes.' It is difficult to believe there can be any certainty about the action of a body, the owner of which has carefully refrained from considering the future. But if not, civilization vanishes; or if a fragment remains it has lost all claim to its former title—for it is wholly dependent on the body, and has ceased to be self-conscious and reflective. This seems to be the moral of a book written, as its author repeats, to assist in the defence of civilization.

There is no need, nor in view of his previous books would it be possible, to doubt his word; they gave abundant evidence of goodwill, which the present book does not impugn. And perhaps its importance lies here: its sole importance is symptomatic, in that it shows how the best of wills to-day may be in danger, not only of defeat but of reversal. There is a disability or a disease

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abroad—the stronger word is not too strong—by which the mind, prevented from fulfilling the intention with which it sets out, is compelled to fulfil another and at times very different one. This mental ataxy is curious ; and as it is by no means confined to Mr. Chase, may be grave. An account of one or two more of its symptoms may decide upon this, and may help towards a diagnosis.

Mr. Chase's first chapter is to some extent autobiographical. ' I found it impossible,' he says, ' to read philosophy. The great words went round and round in my head until I became dizzy. Sometimes they made pleasant music, but I could rarely effect passage between them and the world of experience. William James I could usually translate, but the great classics had almost literally no meaning to me . . . As these works had been acclaimed for centuries as part of the priceless heritage of mankind, it seemed obvious that something in my intellectual equipment was seriously deficient.' The conclusion recommends itself to common sense. Nevertheless Mr. Chase did not seek to improve his equipment, or did so in an unfortunate way. He turned to mathematicians and to writers on ' semantics,' by whom he was ' encouraged to believe ' that his equipment had never been other than complete. If a ' priceless heritage ' yielded no benefit to him, that was not because he was unable to gather it, but because there was none to be gathered. He had therefore the privilege and even the duty of neglecting the heritage.

Dr. Johnson proposed a rule, erring perhaps on the side of caution, that no reputation should be neglected when it had stood for a hundred years. Trusting to the word of a few men who have recently become known to a narrow circle, Mr. Chase is ready to neglect reputations which have stood for a millennium. And the word ' neglect ' is to be interpreted in its widest sense : if the ' great classics ' appeared at first to have a little meaning—' almost none,' but still a little—after the study of semantics it became quite clear that they had none at all. Like the supposed writers on questions of peace and war, they had not really written ; but produced merely verbiage, none and no part of which could be either true or false. This second conclusion of Mr. Chase's, flatly contradicting his first, might I think be said to outrage common sense. Yet he adopts it without hesitation, and this I would call

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a second symptom of disease.

Common sense, however, is not an infallible guide, and if not probable it is conceivable that Mr. Chase is right in disregarding it on this matter. Even so, he has taken over from the popular biologists an article of faith which might hold him back from the second conclusion. The prompting of the blood and of the muscles, he believes, is always to an act which is beneficial in the long run. Now the ' great classics,' their disciples and successors, may for the moment be allowed to have meant nothing when they wrote down words ; nevertheless they did something, and followed impulses of the muscles and the blood. In the long run therefore their activity should have produced some benefit ; but according to Mr. Chase the least that can be said of it is that it has not—though it began some two thousand years ago and has been carried on fairly continuously since. Two thousand years is a very long run indeed. Here is a difficulty which he himself recognizes, and seeks to explain.

There was an accident to the machinery, he suggests ; the functioning of the muscles and the blood was deranged. Or in his own language, which is more scientific and more vague: ' Something . . . perverted human survival-behaviour.' It is unfortunate that on the same page he criticizes the Christian doctrine of the Fall, rejecting it as ' an assumption without meaning.' For the perversion which he postulates proves, when it is examined, to be not very dissimilar from the Fall: it was the work of an agent external to its victims, as was the Devil ; who operated near the beginning of history, as did the Devil ; and who, very like the Devil, was a person. Plato is the earliest author whom he mentions ; and towards Plato he feels the emotions of horror, fear and indignation which are felt by Christians towards the Evil One.

This may not seem possible, and indeed I despair of making it appear so ; but should not, perhaps, omit quotation. To Mr. R. M. Hutchins, a ' brilliant young educator ' who proposed that metaphysics should continue to be studied in Universities, Mr. Chase replies: ' Back, young men and women of the twentieth century, to the broad bosom of Plato! Within these academic shades let it be known that Galileo flung his cannon-balls in vain ; Bruno died at the stake to no purpose ; Einstein discovered nothing

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of educational importance. Dr. Hutchins is young to be so tired.' A note of exaltation is I think obvious, and also the blindness of a crusader: Mr. Chase allows himself to forget that Plato is not the whole of metaphysics, that cannon-balls do not crash through every argument, that physical theory supposes as well as provides arguments, and that Bruno was burnt for (among other things) a leaning to Plato.

Indifference to self-contradiction, I would suggest, is a third symptom of Mr. Chase's disease. Not only does he both adopt and reject a doctrine of the Fall, the whole of his book depends upon similar double-dealing. The article of faith he takes over from biologists, for example, is an optimism, and of so universal a kind that by even contemplating disaster he becomes a heretic; yet his main purpose in writing is that imminent disaster may be averted. This contradiction explains the pessimism which we noticed first about him: by itself he would not find it tolerable, nor does he tolerate it; for no sooner has it emerged than for him it is neutralized by an optimism in which he persistently, if inconsistently, believes.

It is not necessary to carry further the hunt for symptoms. Ignorance, or lack of equipment, is obviously one of their causes; but no less obviously it is only a contributory cause. It is not necessarily more harmful than the lack of meaning Mr. Chase attributes to philosophers, and a merely ignorant person would neither have undertaken his book nor, if he had, would have completed it. Alongside and serving to conceal any ignorance there is a remarkable competence based on knowledge of some kind: he writes persuasively, and orders his material well; and if he professes to be unable to read Plato and Spinoza he does not recoil from mathematicians or from *The Meaning of Meaning*. It is on this competence, I think, that the diagnost should fix. It will be found to have two characters: Mr. Chase is able to write not persuasively but soundly only about the material conditions of civilization, about the means to it which do not form part of its essence—food, clothing, shelter and so on—and he is able to read only the books which are written in the idiom of his own day. The rest are 'meaningless' to him.

Recent centuries and especially the last have demanded rapidly increasing amounts of food, clothing and shelter; these amounts

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have passed the bounds of reason and necessity (I do not mean for every individual ; but in this context the problem of distribution is, I think, secondary), so that means have been confounded with ends ; but this is not the only, nor perhaps the most important result. A class has developed, concerned solely to supply material demands ; and it has been educated solely to converse with contemporary merchants and producers, about problems of contemporary marketing and production. It is like the third class in Plato's *Republic*, with the difference that it has never received systematic guidance from above. Now it receives hardly any, and must itself face the problem of guiding. Inevitably it finds difficulty even in becoming aware of the problem, as would a being of two dimensions summoned to control a machine of three. Like Mr. Chase's, its knowledge is confined to the present ; but the civilization of which it is put in charge has roots in the past, and is continually branching out into the future. The consequences are the disease we have been considering: isolation of the present from past and future leads to self-contradiction ; acceptance of contradictions is the flouting of common sense; proposals supposedly for the future but merely for the perpetuation of the present are the future's denial, and will be its destruction. Let us lie back and fold our hands, says Mr. Chase, we need only to wait and see ; unaware that it is our nature to act, and the perfection of that nature to act reasonably.

The remedies to a disease of this kind cannot be other than slow in operation ; they can however only be tried, in the hope that their operation will not be too slow. Ceaseless criticism must be directed against those books which have so much impressed Mr. Chase, or against his interpretation of them. It might be suggested, for example, that his wide use of the term ' meaningless ' is not justified even by Mr. Richards, from whom presumably he derives it: Mr. Richards distinguished scientific from emotive language, the first alone having meaning in the usual sense, not with the intention of handing civilization to the sole direction of the sciences, but of securing a share in that direction to art and poetry. Almost certainly that is not the way to secure art and poetry their proper share: but if Mr. Chase and his like can be brought to attach any value to poetry at all it will be a gain ; and they will not be wholly out of contact with the past. And secondly,

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of course, Mr. Chase can only be persuaded to allow the 'great classics' another chance. He must be habituated to them. How to begin is a problem; but a passage like the following might perhaps be sufficient to rouse his attention. The speaker is Socrates in prison:

> 'I found the writer made no use of Mind at all, and that he assigned no causes for the order of things. His causes were air, and ether, and water, and many other strange things . . . in the same way he would go on to explain why I am talking to you: he would assign voice, and air, and hearing, and a thousand other things as causes; but he would quite forget to mention the real cause, which is that since the Athenians thought it right to condemn me, I have thought it right and just to sit here and submit to whatever sentence they may think fit to impose. For, by the dog of Egypt, I think that these muscles and bones would long ago have been in Megara or Boeotia, prompted by their opinion of what is best, if I had not thought it better and more honourable to submit to whatever penalty the state inflicts, rather than escape by flight.'

Is this really so incomprehensible? Can Mr. Chase maintain in sincerity that it is meaningless? Can he even maintain that it is a less plausible account of human behaviour than his own 'I wait and see what my body does when the time comes'? Or if this last is in fact how Mr. Chase behaves, can he approve of himself exactly as he does of Socrates? That he should think more highly of himself need not, perhaps, be supposed.

The result of such habituation, if Mr. Chase can submit to it, might be a recognition that the scepticism with which his book begins, and which he thinks something new in the history of thought, is as old as thought itself; that philosophy is built on its refutation rather than awaits destruction at its hands: and that to neglect the 'great classics' in order to write books of the kind he has now produced is to do what the barbarians did—erect huts among the palaces of Rome, burn libraries because they could not read.

JAMES SMITH.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KAFKA

AMERICA. by Franz Kafka (Routledge, 8/6).

The unfamiliarity of Kafka's method as a novelist offers the literary critic an opportunity for discussing quite a wide range of subject-matter with some show of relevance. The sound critic of impeccable orthodoxy can run through his mental card-index, where, somewhere among Tragedy, the Lyric and the Epic, he will find a neglected but still serviceable dossier on the Allegory (*cf.* Bunyan). Those more fully equipped with modern conveniences can pass many a pleasant hour tracking to earth Kafka's Castration Complex or Super-Ego fixation. Or if everything else fails, it is always possible to analyse one of Shakespeare's plays in detail just to show what a good literary critic you are even though you can't understand Kafka.

The most obvious of the temptations that offer themselves is a discussion of Kafka's philosophy. The Kierkegaardian system of belief that was responsible for much of the form and content of Kafka's novels is sufficiently remote from contemporary English habits of thought for an account of it to give an appearance of throwing light on the novelist's apparent obscurities. And it does seem as though the Danish philosopher's conception of a religious way of life transcending human codes and sanctions was peculiarly profitable in stimulating Kafka's approach to his material. For whether or not we care to admit from a doctrinal point of view the possibility of a teleological suspension of the ethical, there can be no doubt that something of this kind is assumed whenever one asserts the universality of a work of art. The explicit moral concern of any given artist (and most have something of the sort) may be his source of strength, but what will make his work of lasting significance will be his insight into the sensible and mental reactions of the human being to everyday experience and into the problems that arise therefrom. Whether or not, therefore, Kafka was proselytizing on Kierkegaard's behalf isn't relevant to literary-critical evaluation. Our concern is with his success in recreating from a sympathetic and consistent standpoint the complexity of the individual problem in its wider and profounder implications. I think it can be shown that he does this with an insight as penetrating as that of any other novelist of our time.

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The Castle was Kafka's last and greatest achievement in the novel form, and any estimate of his significance as a novelist is bound to start from a consideration of this apotheosis of his method. Here the trends of interest that appear rather diversely in the earlier novels are fused to give an account of the whole range of human experience in what seemed to Kafka its most significant implications. The ultimate concern is religious. In Kafka's view there is a way of life for any individual that is the right one, and which is divinely sanctioned. So much is perhaps admitted by most of our moral novelists ; but to Kafka this fact itself constitutes a problem of tremendous difficulty, because he believes the dichotomy between the divine and the human, the religious and the ethical, to be absolute. Thus, though it is imperative for us to attempt to follow the true way, it is impossible for us to succeed in doing so. This is the fundamental dilemma that Kafka believes to lie at the basis of all human effort. He gives some insight into its nature in *Investigations of a Dog*, where the dog-world corresponds roughly to human society and we as humans bear something of the same relationship to the hero as the Castle officials bear to Kafka in *The Castle*. The solution of the Dog's problems is perfectly plain to us, yet we can see that the Dog is constitutionally incapable of ever realizing the solution.

This fundamental problem, however, doesn't present itself to the human mind in naked simplicity. It isn't the Puritan problem of justifying one's behaviour in the eyes of God alone. The dilemma is conceived of as becoming known to us only at the ethical level ; that is, it emerges as the general problem of the individual's relation to society, and any attempt at a solution must involve an attempt to come to terms with, and find a place in, the social organism. We are told, and it is probably true, that Kafka felt this problem with peculiar acuteness in virtue of his racial isolation as a Jew and his general isolation as a consumptive ; but it is important to realize that this only made more keenly felt a difficulty that is implicit in any attempt at social organization, and one that has manifested itself particularly in recent years as a result of the centrifugal tendencies of modern civilization. In '*He,' Notes from the Year 1920*, Kafka writes:

> 'He was once part of a monumental group. Round some elevated figure or other in the centre were ranged in carefully

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> thought-out order symbolical images of the military caste, the arts, the sciences, the handicrafts. He was one of those many figures. Now the group is long since dispersed, or at least he has left it and makes his way through life alone. He no longer has even his old vocation, indeed he has forgotten what he once represented. Probably it is this very forgetting that gives rise to a certain melancholy, uncertainty, unrest, a certain longing for vanished ages, darkening the present. And yet this longing is an essential element in human effort, perhaps indeed human effort itself.'

One has only to run one's mind over the more significant literature of Kafka's generation, from *St. Mawr* and *The Waste Land* to *Ulysses* and *Manhatten Transfer* to realize how prominent a part this view of modern European civilization has played in determining the artist's attitude to his material. Pre-occupation with this problem—the problem presented by the corruption, not of the individual as such, but of the inter-human relationships that give him significance as a member of civilized society—recurs throughout Kafka's work, and is realized most effectively in his short story, *The Hunger-Artist*. Its more positive aspects are persistent throughout *The Castle*, where the hero's whole efforts are directed immediately towards an attempt to establish himself in a home and a job, and to become a member of the village community—to come to terms, in fact, with society.

Kafka's particularization of the teleological problem doesn't stop at the social level, however. Just as the attempt to follow the religious way of life is seen as a social problem, so the social problem is in its turn seen as one that appears in terms of individual human relationships. The complexity of relationship that exists between the individual and the undiscoverable way of life emerges as the complexity of the relationships between the hero and the other characters in Kafka's novels. In this his method isn't essentially different from that of most other novelists ; the difference lies in that, in his treatment of inter-human relationships, Kafka's concern is always for their more general implications, their significance for the social, and ultimately for the religious, problem, and the framework and properties of the novels are constructed with this consideration in mind. But just for this reason he is scrupulously careful in presenting even the minutest detail relating to any given

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situation, so that the complexity never becomes confusion, and the nature and extent of the subtlety and delicacy of the network of relationships are always exactly determined at any given point. His language maintains an almost scientific lucidity, and there is an almost complete absence of explicit figures of speech in his prose. His eye is always on the object, noting carefully details like change of tone in a person's voice, whether a person is sitting or standing, and even what he is wearing—all such points are noted with a view to objectifying the exact relationship between two people. Explicit comment is rarely offered by the author ; the implications of every detail are allowed to speak for themselves in creating the atmospheric tension that arises as soon as two people enter one another's sphere of consciousness, and the detailed precision with which the shifts and changes in that tension are traced invests them with a constant sense of apocalyptic significance ; so that sudden shifts into the physical are quite in keeping with the whole effect:

> ' For a moment K. thought that all of them, Schwarzer, the peasants, the landlord and the landlady, were going to fall on him in a body, and to escape at least the first shock of their assault he crawled right underneath the blanket. (*The Castle*, p. 6).

The effect of this passage is to crystallize the whole emotional atmosphere when it is discovered that K. has no right in the village and has lied about it into the bargain, and the explicit physical action of crawling underneath the blanket, though obviously useless as a protective measure, serves to epitomize K.'s emotional reaction to this atmosphere.

The basis of Kafka's method thus lies in the creation of a complex and continually changing dramatic situation subsisting mainly in the relation between the hero and the other characters. Where the prose is not concerned with defining some element in an interhuman relationship, either external or introspective, but with describing the hero's situation purely objectively, it frequently becomes itself dramatic in movement:

> ' So ging er wieder vorwärts, aber es war ein langer Weg. Die Strasse nämlich, diese Hauptstrasse des Dorfes, führte nicht zum Schlossberg, sie führte nur nahe heran, dann aber, wie

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absichtlich, bog sie ab, und wenn sie sich auch vom Schloss nich entfernte, so kamm sie ihm doch auch nicht näher.' (*Das Schloss*, p. 21).

The effect of the prose here is to produce the sense of physical effort appropriate to the situation. The short phrases and the jerky movement of the sentence suggest the feeling of frustrated effort that K. experienced, striving to get nearer the Castle, but repeatedly being prevented. The end of the sentence gives us a closer view of the process ; the movement forward—' sie führte nur nahe heran,' the pause—' dann aber,' the moment of suspense, hanging on the tortuous syllables of ' wie absichtlich,' then the sudden recoil, like a spring snapping back into place—' bog sie ab,' then the ensuing sense of disappointment and disillusion, embodied in the flat phrasing of ' so kam sie ihm doch auch nicht näher.' One is reminded of the similar passage in Donne's third Satyre in more ways than one.

It is necessary to insist on this fusion of the mental with the physical in Kafka's work for two reasons. In the first place, it is the basis of his allegorical method. The whole of his hero's experience, whether spiritual, mental, emotional or physical, is regarded as absolutely continuous, and the distinctions that for the sake of exposition I have drawn between the religious, the social and the individual levels simply do not exist in the actual writing. The objectification of emotional experience into physical that I have noted emerges in the large as the concrete visualization of the individual's sense of the wider issues of existence in terms of the institutions and officials that characterize his novels and stories. Secondly, it is this preoccupation with the concrete and the physical that forces itself first on the reader's attention, and the remoter implications of the hopeless struggle are realized only over a wide area ; the stress, that is, is on the struggle and not on the hopelessness, and the preoccupation with this struggle in the most immediate sense engages the reader's emotional energies, directs and disciplines them, and offers him a positive interest amid what would in abstraction be described as a philosophy of pessimism.

Cogent criticism of Kafka's work is bound to direct the reader's attention to *The Castle*, and it is more important that he should have before him in approaching *America* such general considerations

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as I have outlined above than a ' placing ' of the novel under review that left him with no conception of Kafka's importance as a novelist. Nor is this approach of no immediate relevance, because those standards by which *The Castle* is appraised must also be referred to in finding the two earlier novels of less importance. In *The Trial*, which in point of time comes between *America* and *The Castle*, the religious considerations which are the implicit ultimate in the later novel predominate, and it is the dichotomy between the actual true way and our conception of the true way that is insisted on, with the result that the unity and continuity of method isn't here present. In *America* this preoccupation with teleological considerations doesn't intrude at the expense of more immediate interests, not because, as in *The Castle*, it has been completely assimilated to those interests, but simply because religious considerations haven't yet become so pressing to the author. Although the novel has the same purposive air of endless pilgrimage about it, the purposiveness is not insisted upon, and the light-hearted symbolization of spiritual salvation in the incomplete last chapter is entirely in keeping with the implicit general assumption that ' it will all come right in the end '—an assumption that allows the whole question to be a less constant concern. The disruptive effect of *The Trial* is thus avoided, as the general organization at the more immediate levels—what I have for convenience called the social and personal levels—is complete. With this source of emotional pressure much diminished, the whole texture of the novel is much looser and the effects less concentrated, though the method is the same.

The hero, Karl, is expelled from his habitual environment for a venial sexual offence, and makes his acquaintance with a new order of things, first on the liner in which he leaves Europe, and then in America itself. In the liner we find that same highly-organized, incomprehensible hierarchy of officials that appears in the later novels, and they serve much the same function of objectifying the individual's sense of human society, both locally and generally, as a complex organization the nature of whose bonds he can scarcely comprehend. Kafka gives his account in terms of an encounter between Karl and the captain and officers of the ship, and he uses to the full his powers of expressing the interaction of human personality in order to achieve his effect. American

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civilization later plays a similar function in the hero's life, and Kafka makes clear that full participation in community life is something to which there is no golden road. As in *The Castle*, his attempts to achieve this meet with the more *real* success the less ambitious they become. Hobnobbing with social organization at its most sophisticated proves a complete failure ; as soon as its assistance is required in quite a trivial matter in the process of living, it lets him down completely. Then Karl becomes one of the time-serving bell-hops of the social organism with which we are all familiar (Kafka, of course, makes him a real bell-hop in a big hotel), and seems to have achieved some real success in establishing himself in a satisfactory way of life ; but when the crucial moment comes, his second position proves of little more value than the first. So he sinks lower and lower in society, coming closer and closer to grips with the realities of the problem that arises from being a member of a complex civilization, until finally (' finally ' in a purely relative sense ; since the novel is not only incomplete but endless, there can be no finality) he is submitted to all sorts of indignities at the hands of the mistress of a ruffianly tramp, and at last approaches some degree of the awareness of his problem which is the asymptote to success of solution. The technique is less accomplished than that of *The Castle* because of the sense of unrealized possibilities that indicates the author's incomplete grasp of his material ; yet the achievement is comparable, and in a final estimate it would probably have to be ranked as Kafka's second greatest work ; because a final estimate of Kafka's work would have to take account of limitations which didn't seem relevant to a short review.

Such an estimate would, of course, rest upon the German texts. But English readers have been most unusally lucky in having translators who have been at such pains to render their original not only accurately, but with sympathetic attention to details of style and expression. It seems to me that in the future Mr. and Mrs. Muir's translation will stand as a model for any others who undertake the thankless job of rendering a German novelist into English.

R. O. C. WINKLER.

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AUDEN AND ISHERWOOD

ON THE FRONTIER, by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

Messrs. Auden and Isherwood continue to follow their principle of putting Marxist pap into bourgeois bottles. They call this repast a melodrama in three acts, but unfortunately it doesn't deserve that title. *On The Frontier* is a tract, similar in formula to their other productions, but duller.

The theme is topical. We are shown two countries, Westland and Ostnia, the first a dictatorship and the second a monarchy ; both hate each other and both indulge in mutually destructive propaganda. There is an ' incident '—a 'bus carrying Westlanders and Ostnians is blown up at a frontier bridge ; each country blames the other, each reports only the deaths of its own nationals. War is declared, plague breaks out, there is a revolution in Westland, and we are left with the prospect of a world war.

We watch the countries and the crisis through the eyes of the Westland Leader, of Valerian, a Westland armaments racketeer, and of an average Westland and an average Ostnian family. In presenting the two families, the authors make use of the divided stage, one of those ingenious tricks (they used to be called ' expressionistic ') which often seem to me to be merely an evasion of the problems of dramatic construction. ' The concentration of lighting,' they tell us, ' should heighten the impression of an invisible frontier between the two halves of the stage.' Both the Westland and the Ostnian rooms are dominated by a wireless set, and the portraits of the Leader and the Monarch. Four characters can cross the frontier ; the armaments racketeer and his secretary, an Ostnian spy ; Eric, a Westland student, and Anna, the daughter of the Ostnian household. The first pair symbolize the international of high finance, the others stand for what one must I suppose call the international of love, or of the spirit. Valerian tries to prevent the war, because it's bad for business, but he fails, and is shot by a revengeful storm-trooper formerly sacked from the Valerian works. Eric, at first a pacifist, dies on the barricades of the Westland revolution, and Anna of the plague contracted in an Ostnian hospital. They fail, too, but

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'They die to make men just
And worthy of the earth.'

Or, as the hymn more crisply puts it, 'they die to make us good.'

Perhaps I can best explain my dissatisfaction with the play by saying that though I know what the authors are getting at, though I can follow the parallelism of the two internationals, the symbolism of the intangible yet insuperable barrier, I do not for one moment feel these things. I understand the message, and I sympathize with it; as messages go it's very sensible, but that doesn't alter the fact that I experience nothing, and for this there are three reasons.

As an imitation of an action, the play's a failure. There is, properly speaking, no action at all. True, things happen, and there are economic and political and psychological connections between them; but there are no dramatic connections at all. If you're not going to have a plot, you shouldn't call your play a melodrama.

There is respectable authority for believing that character and dialogue are easier to manage than action. Are Messrs. Auden and Isherwood any better here? I don't think they are. Examine, for example, the way they have presented Valerian, the bad financier. He is suave and cultured; he collects Poussins, and also etchings; he is very intelligent and very superior, and soothes the Leader's nerve-storms by playing him Rameau on the gramophone; he rather reminded me of Philo Vance, and he is just about as credible. All the main characters are composed of mannerisms from the stock wardrobe, plus motives from psycho-analytical casebooks—there is no true creation about them at all. We might at least have been spared the etchings.

The prose dialogue doesn't help us to believe in the characters, and I can't think that it will help the actors either. Before I had read many pages of the scene between Valerian and his secretary, I was reminded of Andrew Undershaft—the resemblance is pretty striking. Now I dislike the flippant superficiality of *Major Barbara* as much as I admire the serious intent of *On The Frontier*; but if one considers the two roles, speech for speech, and asks oneself which one would prefer to play, there is no doubt about the answer. Every phrase of Shaw's comes trippingly off the tongue, but to read Valerian's lines aloud is hard and ill-rewarded labour.

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It seems to me that Mr. Isherwood should be able to put these defects right. A coat or two of the slick varnish that encases Mr. Norris and Sally Bowles, and an echo of their cheerful chatter, would brighten this play no end.

But the root of the trouble is simply lack of fusion. The various elements are not combined, and until the authors can construct a coherent play, until, in other words their message, their world view, becomes a play, they had better continue to use the revue rather than the drama as their vehicle. The world-view seems a bit synthetic too. We have now long been accustomed to having the bearded Nobodaddy, Marx, as President of the Immortals ; we have been led to regard Professor Freud as the ghostly partner. Now, I believe, the Trinity is completed, the diet balanced, the pap shaken up and dissolved in the milk of human kindness. Is it possible that one discerns, however dimly, in the vague features of the third person, the lineaments of Dr. Buchman?

T. R. BARNES.

'HUMAN NATURE' IN SOCIETY

SEX AND TEMPERAMENT IN THREE PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES, by Margaret Mead (Routledge, 10/6).

Mme. de Staël, on being informed that Napoleon was unable to receive visitors since he was in his bath, is reported to have exclaimed '*Le génie ne connait point deux sexes,*' and, I suppose, at that time it was necessary to be a genius to achieve such ignorance. Readers of Dr. Margaret Mead's book are more fortunate in that they will scarcely have needed genius to realize that now there can be no arbitrary sex-classification in terms of temperaments. Dr. Mead writes so convincingly and intelligently on the social determination of behaviour that one is tempted to throw up one's hands in admiration and endorse the publisher's opinion that this is an extremely valuable book, if not exactly so original as they seem to think. The documentation is very convincing, almost, one is inclined to believe, too convincing. The remarkable aptness of the illustrations leads one to give more credence than is their due, perhaps, to the reports of other anthropologists who obtained

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very different results from the same tribes. But it is unreasonable to allow, as many distinguished anthropologists have allowed, the existence of this contrary evidence to discount altogether Dr. Mead's approach. Indeed, it would seem more profitable to use this additional evidence to correct the focus on the problem. The main trouble is probably that a great deal of loose thinking, largely prompted by party-politics, has been allowed to obscure the real issue, and at this time it does seem imperative to treat this question of the relation of the individual to his culture with that same cool detachment and precision with which Dr. Mead herself tackles the problem.

It is now becoming familiar knowledge that the attitudes and emotional responses of two individuals confronting the same situation may be remarkably different if they come from different social groups. Administrators in Assam declare that one may order flogging as punishment for an Angami Naga with some hope of benefit to the victim, while to order it for his neighbour the Lhota is to risk the suicide of the punished native ; the Dyak answers insults with revenge in terms of theft or murder, the Trobriand Islander in terms of suicide. Dr. Mead would immediately suggest that this is because the social patterns are different and different attitudes in the individual are induced by the different patterns

In other cases the outer, ' peripheral ' behaviour of people may differ greatly from one society to another and yet leave their more intimate feelings much the same. One Naga tribe, believing dead souls to contaminate all that they have owned or come into contact with, burn everything belonging to the deceased except the livestock, which they turn loose into the jungle, so reducing the family to utter poverty. A neighbouring tribe, which holds contrary ideas and has a feast to induce the soul of the deceased to keep near them, is said to make not a little profit out of their neighbour's fears. But, observers report, the more intimate responses of the individuals in both tribes appear to be similar, *i.e.*, the reaction to a bereavement familiar to us in our own society.[1] This kind of evidence, of which there is a considerable

[1]It is important to remember here that the familiar problem of the observer's own predispositions may have completely distorted the evidence.

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amount, would seem to establish the existence of at least two modes of response, one public and one private, as it were.

This private conduct, it seems, Dr. Mead would impute only to the deviant. But ordinary observation of one's own society suggests that it is characteristic of the majority: some few people appear to have a public code only, some a private code only, but most people have both. The interrelations of the two levels of behaviour are complex and, as yet, little understood, nor can it be said that these modes of response are essentially different in kind. The outlines of the social pattern are forms which prescribe a fixed mode of response that is generally cruder, more limited, and, sometimes, altogether different in appearance from the actual living experience.

But at this point caution is necessary. We must beware of regarding this ' actual living experience ' as revealing the ' innate disposition ' which Dr. Mead takes as the chief contrast with socially moulded behaviour. Instead of any simple contrast we seem to find successive layers of socialization as we pass from the outer forms of behaviour to more and more intimate responses. In fact it proves exceedingly difficult to indicate any point at which we can safely say the culturally moulded responses end and those which are physiologically determined begin. The Trobriand son is bound by social custom to conceal disgust and shew reverent joy while sucking the bones of his deceased father ; in actual fact he generally vomits.[1] One has heard it suggested that here there is a distinct opposition between the cultural form and the physiologically determined reaction, but if it is remembered that these people at this ceremony also *expect* the son to be sick it will be seen that it is quite impossible that the disgust reaction is socially conditioned. Nagas of Assam have been known to eat elephant which had been buried for a fortnight and was already in an advanced stage of decomposition. We have in fact no evidence, beyond a certain amount of rough observation, that could be used to prove that private behaviour is any closer related to ' innate disposition ' (whatever that may be) than public behaviour.

Although Dr. Mead has done very valuable work in shewing the various ways in which the social forms may mould or distort

[1]Malinowski *Sexual Life of Savages*, p. 133.

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the personality it will be seen that her use of the term 'innate disposition' and her treatment of the problem of deviants are naïve. A more complete handling of the problem would examine the ways in which the different levels of response, which we have arbitrarily, and crudely, separated into 'public' and 'private,' *interact* as complementary parts of the same temperament. In such an inquiry 'temperament' would not be regarded as something detailed and arbitrary from which details are selected and moulded by the social forms but as a product of the interaction between the individual and his environment, differing not in kind but only in subtlety and intimacy from the solidified social forms. Considering the magnitude of such a task one is tempted to believe Dr. Mead's more limited approach to have more immediately valuable results. In any case it is increasingly obvious that the help of the psychologist must be invoked, since the difficulties of communication make the task more and more impossible in examination of members of primitive societies, particularly where the native is learning the 'right' answers. It is certain that anthropologists with a smattering of popular psychology will achieve only harm.

In any case, apart from the value we have ascribed to Dr. Mead's work, there is the tactical benefit of her book. Anthropological scholarship seems to have entrenched itself from such 'intellectual bombshells' (*vide* blurb) in the shelters of Frazerian collections, shelters which appear to the detached observer as fatuous as those advocated by the sponsors of A.R.P.

F. C. TINKLER.

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